

Last
GREAT

EXPECTATIONS

The story of the real Miss Havisham

Alan Wardrope

~~CHARLES
DICKENS~~



Lost EXPECTATIONS

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FOR MY FATHER ANDREW,
A PROUD SCOT

Preface

Although the names, places, dates, events and situations of the various characters involved in tracking the remarkable life and times of Eliza Emily Donnithorne have been painstakingly checked, then assembled in chronological order, this work is not intended as a strict biography. Rather, it is a dramatisation of events that occurred to a wealthy aristocratic and privileged family whose heiress daughter was to become a jilted bride and live a self-imposed exile within a locked and shuttered mansion in colonial Sydney. Eliza's unlikely and tragic fate was to inspire Charles Dickens's Miss Havisham in his classic *Great Expectations*.

Although there are several ways Dickens may have become aware of some of the events that happened within the Donnithorne household, with whom he had some links, there was much of which the novelist remained unaware. What has emerged from research, documents and records, and, wherever possible, interviews with descendants of the Donnithorne family, and friends and others, in the United Kingdom, South Africa, India and Australia, is a story of love, friendships, intrigue, betrayal, upstairs and downstairs politics, jealousy and lost expectations.

For the last four decades of her life Eliza remained a recluse in a twilight world of make-believe within a crumbling mansion, once the hub of Sydney society, frequented by visiting dignitaries, the scene of grand balls and receptions. It had become a place to be shunned,

the object of curiosity and gossip. The residence's once well-tended gardens, hedges and manicured lawns had turned into a riot of weeds, silent fountains, overgrown shrubs and brambles. Within the house, behind the sealed doors of the dining room, a wedding feast remained untouched, left to rot into a decaying mess shrouded in cobwebs.

For almost twenty years I have been piecing together how and why such a fate befell a woman born into a noble family, with connections that extended to Britain's Royal Family. Although Eliza Donnithorne was destined to become anointed, rather dubiously, as the role model for literature's most recognised bride-to-be jilted at the altar, there were many somewhat sinister forces at work that shaped the events.

Eliza has virtually become part of the family. Therefore I should acknowledge the support, enthusiasm and encouragement of my wife Thelma, who also came to adopt Eliza into her life, despite the fact that Eliza had become 'the other woman', demanding so much time and commitment on my part.

I also acknowledge the valued input of a friend and colleague John F. Godl, a dedicated and intuitive researcher whose tenacity prised open doors from times past, without which much would have remained in the shadows. Many thanks also to the helpful contribution of Joseph (Lado) Cabatuan, a most talented and creative person when it comes to sniffing out illustrative material, a legacy of his years in film animation. At the risk of appearing an oddball eccentric, I would also acknowledge the role of my little parrot Rusty, for keeping me company as I worked in a cluttered room with bulging shelves and a scatter of books and papers and which I laughingly refer to as my office. Although Rusty's chattering in my ear was always well intended, his input could be sometimes misplaced, especially when alighting on the keys, thus making his own contribution.

Prologue

The second of October 1826 was a blustery day of wind gusts and choppy seas, as the East India Company barque *Rose* commenced beating her way northwards into the broken swells of the South Atlantic. Astern of the pitching vessel, the soaring outline of Table Mountain on the Cape of Good Hope faded slowly into the spray-misted distance. *Rose* was at last on the final, albeit long, leg of the voyage from Calcutta to her home port of London. Built at the Blackwall shipyards of Wells, Wigram and Green and launched in 1810, the *Rose* was a well-found ship, a regular on the Bengal-Madras run and much favoured by those fortunate enough to secure berths aboard such a relatively swift bird of passage.

The square-rigged, three-masted ship was carrying her usual quota of well-heeled passengers—government officials, plantation owners, businessmen, traders, East India Company executives, and the children and servants of expatriate families returning for a spell of home leave.

As the afternoon sun dipped towards the blurred horizon line off the port side, most of the travellers sturdy enough to cope with the wind-swept, canting decks had struggled to their cabins below, to rest for a few hours before dinner gongs were struck. The *Rose* was now lit in a scarlet glare, a farewell gesture from the sinking sun.

One passenger was still lingering on the aft deck, absently noting the two helmsmen standing on each side of the ship's spoked wheel

set behind a polished brass compass binnacle which rose phallic-like from the oaken deck. An officer of the watch at the stern bulwark cast proprietorial glances to the straining canvas above, caught in a web of spidery rigging through which the wind called its tune.

Passenger James Donnithorne, a distinguished-looking man in his early fifties, had many things on his mind, though he took comfort in the slapping hiss of the lumpy sea and the almost rhythmic creaking of the *Rose's* timbers working within the copper sheathing of the vessel's lower flanks. It stirred memories of a chapter in his youth when he had spent almost two years before the mast. It was a past he chose to bury and few knew of his earlier years. After all, he was now His Honour Judge Donnithorne, and it was right and proper that the past was indeed past and hopefully put to rest. Although it was not always so within his own mind when memories could be rekindled by the familiar language of a stout vessel working its way to windward.

James now served justice in the name and interests of Britannia in Bengal, which is attached to the empire's commercial jewel in the sub-continent, the flourishing East India Company. Until recently James Donnithorne had occupied the position of governor of the country's bank, and the future looked as bright as the sunset he now witnessed. A distinguished career, wealth, power and privilege had beckoned from the time James had completed his education, and not simply because he was an intimate of the present king of England, then the Prince Regent, then a young man. James's father acted as adviser to King George III, thus providing his son's access to the Court.

Ironically, it had been his involvement with the prince and his circle of society playboys and wealthy young blades that had undone James. Word of the circle's scandalous escapades reached Parliament. Reports of roistering bordering upon debauchery, involving London's brothels, pubs, clubs and gambling dens, left the King with no alternative other than to place his heir on a tight leash and ensure no contact with those of bad influence.

James was among those deemed by the Royal Court to be an undesirable influence. His distraught father Nicholas was obliged to send James to Coventry by way of a three-year exile as an indentured clerk with the East India Company in Bengal. It was believed that a sympathetic King George pulled the necessary strings to expedite the arrangement, and he was also rumoured to have underwritten the costs involved, including the voyage to Calcutta.

The generous act by the monarch reflected another dimension to the drama. On becoming a close friend of the Prince Regent, James had become bedazzled by the glamour and excitement of high society, a privileged set who appeared answerable to nobody but themselves. To keep up with the wild lifestyle he had amassed debts of more than thirty thousand pounds in his father's name, a fortune at a time when a working-class man would be fortunate to earn ten pounds a year. Nicholas Donnithorne would never fully recover from the financial setback, and eventually was obliged to sell the family home, Coombe Hill House, set in sprawling grounds in the rural setting of Coombe Road. The region was to become known as Croydon.

James was pulled from his reverie by the appearance on deck of the *Rose's* master, Captain Thomas Marquis. A tall, rangy and quietly spoken man in his forties, Marquis had skippered the ship for two years.

'Afternoon, Your Honour. I see you're made of sterner stuff than the rest of my guests,' he grinned.

James shrugged. 'Sometimes solitude is said to be good for one's soul, Captain.' 'I wouldn't know about that, sir,' responded Marquis. 'Never get the opportunity to be alone in this job.'

'No doubt the price of running such a popular vessel, eh?' James suggested with a smile.

'Hmm, perhaps you're right, sir.' After a brief pause, Marquis asked, 'And what is the situation with your good wife? I trust she is bearing up.'

'I'm told by the ship's physician that in her present delicate condition she ought to be bearing down! As you know, babies have a reputation for taking their own good time.'

The captain nodded his agreement. 'How well I know, sir. Have a wife and three young ones awaiting in Portsmouth.'

James took a final look at the sunset off the port side, then turned back to Marquis. 'The physician seems to believe it will be before the night is over.'

Marquis cocked his head. 'Well, pray let us hope so. And, if there is anything I can do, Your Honour, you only need ...'

'Of course,' James smiled. 'I appreciate that, Captain.'

'And you'll be wanting to be with her no doubt?' Marquis added solicitously.

'Indeed I shall. Not that we men seem to contribute much of value at such times,' James noted. He glanced up into the bulging, wind-filled canvas high above. It seemed as though the ship was in a sympathetic pregnancy of her own, a gesture to his wife below decks, undergoing the obligatory pain and suffering to ensure that life went on.

With a dismissive nod, James went over to a companionway, watched by the captain. Marquis had come to the conclusion during the voyage that the judge was rather a nice chap, especially for a toff.

The ship's physician's prediction came true. At 10.30 that night, Sarah Donnithorne gave birth to a healthy baby girl. The new arrival to the family was greeted with much delight by two siblings, ten-year-old Catherine and Penelope, twelve. They each had suggestions as to what the child ought to be named.

The family also numbered two brothers, seventeen-year-old Edward and William, who was two years older. They were both at Harrow. The future path of his sons was among the matters for attention on James's arrival in England. He would agree to William continuing his studies. Edward would be granted a commission in the army, serving in the monarch with whom his father had once

roistered around the fleshpots and places of assignation of London after dark.

The baby was baptised the very next day, as was customary in an age when the incidence of postnatal mortality was high, especially if exacerbated by circumstances of birth.

On a cool autumn morning twenty days later, the green hills of southern England hove into view. The *Rose's* passengers gathered on deck once the news spread that home was at last in sight. For many, including James, it was the first sight of their native land in years.

James had watched the same coastline in an earlier time, except then it had been receding into the distance and he was aboard a brig conveying him in disgrace to Bengal to assume the life of a lowly clerk in the palace-like building of the East India Company's head office in Calcutta. He arrived on the sub-continent on 7 December 1793, where he was assigned the task of making copies of seemingly endless documents by hand, a repetitious chore that he grew to detest. When the opportunity to escape his indentured incarceration arose, he seized the moment. He talked his way into a posting aboard a Royal Navy ship about to sail on an exploration detail to chart islands of the Torres Strait between Australia and New Guinea and the east coast of Australia, in the wake of Captain James Cook's voyage of many years beforehand.

When at last the task had been carried out, the navy vessel put into Port Adelaide. Waiting on the wharf were officers with a warrant for James's arrest for breaking his contractual obligations to the East India Company. He was transported in chains back to Calcutta to resume his clerk's role. The experience had been a turning point. He resolved to make amends and make something of his lot, to help absolve the hurt and disgrace his earlier behaviour had wrought upon his dismayed family.

And succeed he did. Ambition, amazing drive and sheer determination saw him rise through the ranks, eventually to the highest posts of power and authority within the East India Company.

His remarkable acumen for business and trade enabled him to amass both fortune and influence. Earlier expectations had been retrieved. On 7 October 1807 he married Sarah Eliza Bampton, the daughter of a distinguished Royal Navy captain, a navigator and explorer in his own right.

A stickler for details, on arrival in London James prevailed upon Captain Marquis to deliver a record of his daughter's birth aboard the *Rose* off the Cape Coast on the return voyage. It was to be delivered to the South African colony's Register of Baptisms. Included were the date, time, those present and the subsequent baptism, set forth by the ship's physician and witnessed by the ship's master. At the time the vessel had encountered heavy weather, and the quill-wielding ship's doctor struggled with his penmanship as the vessel rolled in the swells. As a result, the figure '6' took on the appearance of a '1', albeit with a lower swirl of ink. Thus the date was misread by those in Cape Town. For the rest of James's daughter's life the birth record so lodged would suggest she had been born five years premature. However, the writer got the name right : Eliza Emily Donnithorne.

Eliza was to be destined for a life of comfort, privilege, wealth and great expectations. But all would end in tragedy.

Post Script

The vessel *Rose*, which bore the newborn Eliza on the family visit to England, would continue to undertake long voyages, some as distant as China. In 1834 she was sold for £4500. In 1838 *Rose* was sent to the shipbreakers.

On completion of his education, James Donnithorne's elder son William followed his brother Edward into the military.

The Donnithorne family home in London, Coombe Hill House, built around 1713, was later to be occupied by Lord Heath, a diplomat. In the 19th century it was a boys' school. In 1966 it became the Labour movement's trades union headquarters in Croydon. Now named Ruskin House, it retains much of its original character.

In his novel *Great Expectations*, published in serial form between December 1860 and August 1861, Charles Dickens created a character who became a well-known and enduring figure of English literature. It is generally accepted that Miss Havisham was a central inspiration for the novel. There was a real Miss Havisham. Her name was Eliza Emily Donnithorne. This is her story.



Chapter One

Stanley Watts was a newcomer to the role of watchman. He was determined, though, to make the most of the opportunity his first assignment might offer, hoping, perhaps, that it might lead to more such work. The night hours, alone in the dark and cold, were not all that attractive but, with the typical stoicism of a Londoner, he accepted that beggars could not be choosers, particularly in the present difficult times. Besides, he was ticket-of-leave man—a thief and convict who had been granted his freedom to work.

Watts also saw the humorous aspect of now being a sort of guardian of law and order. Quite a change in roles. On reflection, his offence wasn't too serious. However, thirty years ago, back in the Old Dart, the theft of a gentleman's gold watch and chain did tend to be looked upon much the same as stealing his horse. Depending on the mood of the Beak, sitting on the Bench wearing his goat's-hair wig of authority, one could be taken to a crowded prison hulk on the Thames, which was how he had ended up in Sydney Town.

Like the judge, Watts had tried to dress the part to reflect his new-found authority: a battered bowler hat—pity about its condition, but it was the only headpiece he had—a leather waistcoat, leggings, high boots and a wooden truncheon attached to his cowhide belt. He sniffed at the cool air of the deepening dusk. It would soon be time to fire up the brazier, so that he would have glowing coals to see him through the night's vigil. He had to make a circuit of the

boundaries of the old mansion that was his charge every hour or so. Not that he could imagine there could be much worth nicking from the now-derelict, overgrown and neglected mess that had once been a grand home to gentry. Watts knew that the crumbling building was a place of curiosity, though, especially since its mysterious mistress had recently passed away, leaving a legacy of gossip and speculation.

When Watts was briefed about the job, he was told to be on the lookout for vandals as well as the curious who might be tempted to souvenir items from the mansion's sprawling grounds.

At first sight he had been taken aback how anyone could have lived in such a run-down place for just on forty years, far less its mistress along with two elderly maidservants. The shuttered windows—some askew, others coming adrift—and barricaded doors made the looming building at the end of the overgrown driveway look sinister. He noticed that the house's main doors appeared not to have been sealed like the other entrances. Watts recalled that he had heard that a light gleamed each night at the main entrance. A fanciful tale he dismissed as a product of overworked imaginations.

As darkness was closing in, the brazier's coals started to steam, spit and crackle above the kindling. In about a half hour they should be glowing red winking eyes from within their iron-laced basket. Satisfied with his handiwork, Watts was about to do a circuit around the mansion when some raised voices caught his attention. A group of street urchins had gathered farther down the road at the far end of the wall. A jostling pack of bobbing heads, moving bodies, some jumping up and down, arms flailing, were dancing to a cacophany of shrill shouts, excited exchanges, nervous laughter.

Watts straightened up, deciding to investigate. As he approached the urchins he pumped up to his maximum stature of five feet and seven inches, striding in what he thought was the manner of the local constabulary. In as gruff a voice as he could muster, Watts called, 'Oi, there! What do you think you're up to!'

The blur of bodies froze, then started their frenetic movements afresh, though with more urgency. 'Hurry up!' 'It's a nark!' 'Time to get going!' 'Quick!' came the shouts.

The din masked the sound of a carriage creaking to a stop on the opposite side of the street.

As Watts drew closer to the urchins something thumped to the ground. With that, like wraiths, the group turned and faded into the growing darkness. He was left standing by a haemorrhaging and discarded paint tin. There was a brush close by.

On the wall splattered letters streaming paint trails read:

*The mad old
Wich is ded*

Watts shook his head in disgust and helplessness. He was still looking at the graffiti when a young man who had alighted from the carriage stepped beside him. The situation erased the rules of formality between the two witnesses.

'That lot ought to be at school,' Watts growled.

The newcomer, fashionably clad and in his late twenties, eyed the literary effort. 'You're right. A touch of education would not have gone astray.'

Watts looked back to the wall none-the-wiser. 'Eh?'

The young man exhaled his breath, raised an eyebrow. 'And was she ...'

'Was she what?' Watts was not sure what the well-spoken young gent was on about.

'A mad old witch?'

Watts shrugged. 'There'll be plenty who'll tell you that. Like she was all alone. Locked up, they say, for round forty years. Weren't natural.'

The young man nodded at Watts's dangling truncheon. 'I take it you're in charge of security around here.'

Watts shot a rueful glance at the urchins' handiwork. 'In a manner of speaking. Keeping away the stickybeaks until Saturday's auction.'

The man nodded, turned and walked the few paces to the iron gates, which sported a measles-like rash of rust. He took in the sight of neglect and decay. The growing darkness made it even more forlorn.

'It all looks so sad,' he breathed.

Watts decided to look on the bright side. 'They'll all be here tomorrow, guv. A clean-up gang. Spend the next few days tidying things.'

'Really? They will have their work cut out, I imagine.'

'Can't argue with that. Glad it's them and not me,' Watts responded.

The young man smiled. He extended his hand. 'Permit me to introduce myself. The name is Moore, Colbert Moore.'

Watts was momentarily unsure, and surprised that an educated young man would treat him with formality. 'I'm Watts—Stan Watts,' he said, accepting the handshake.

As Moore took Watts's callused hand, he added, 'I'm with the *Herald*. The *Sydney Morning Herald*.'

'Oh, the paper. Well, don't think there's any story here, Mr Moore. That old pile of bricks isn't going to tell any tales.'

Moore shrugged. 'Oh, one can never be sure, Mr Watts. So ... would it, er, be possible for me to—as you say—have a stickybeak? While there's still a bit of light?'

'Don't know about that. I'm supposed to keep the gates shut and locked. They're my orders.'

Moore persisted. 'I shan't be too long. Just a quick look around before it's completely dark. We call it obtaining background material. I would be grateful ...'

Watts hesitated. Although flattered that his standing and authority were recognised, he shook his head, becoming the officious guardian. 'Can't do that, guv. More than my job's worth.'

Moore sighed. He usually got his way, encouraged people to open up, but he had to concede that the plodding Stanley Watts was a hopeless case.

As his carriage rattled away along the pot-holed streets, back to his lodgings in the city, Colbert Moore knew he was facing a challenge. But he was convinced that there had to be quite a story once the riddle of the old mansion and its reclusive mistress was unravelled. He promised himself that he would be the one to unearth the truth, separate the facts from the fiction, the rumours, speculation and gossip.

Moore and watchman Stanley Watts were to be united on one issue. They were proved right about Camperdown Lodge's tidy up and facelift.

The army of workmen who descended on the place faced a multitude of challenges. First was to scrub the floors, walls, ceilings, hallways and staircases. As if mocking the combined efforts of sweat, zeal, limewater and carbolic soap, the remnants of rot and decay stubbornly cloyed to everything and everyone who entered the mansion. It was like lingering memories that refused to die, haunting the place, whispering its secrets. Outside, beyond the shuttered windows, in the unkempt jungle that had once been tended by a staff of gardeners, it was a riot of overgrown bushes, shrubs and weeds, including a handful of tenacious botanical survivors.

The decaying monolith of Camperdown Lodge had been a source of fascination for generations of curious children, their parents and the citizens of Newtown, a growing suburb on the western fringe of burgeoning Sydney Town. But now things were about to change. Sensing the end of an era, the citizenry held their collective breaths.

Eliza Emily Donnithorne was dead. The mistress of Camperdown Lodge, who had lived the life of a recluse for so many years, had passed away peacefully on 20 May 1886.

And with the irony of change, so often the legacy of death, those who were about to enter the halls, reception rooms, suites and

cavernous chambers of the grand home would never have been permitted to set a foot beyond the imposing gates in former circumstances. A new master of Camperdown Lodge was about to hold reign briefly. From his auctioneer's rostrum, he would orchestrate the fate of the buildings and their treasures, scattering the tangible remnants of life and memories with each blow of his gavel.

The narrow dirt road called Newtown Road, later changed to King Street in recognition of James Donnithorne's close friend George IV, witnessed one of the first traffic jams in the colony's history. Carriages, sulkies, gigs, carts, coaches, drays, horsemen and those on foot jammed the street as the curious made their way to Eliza Donnithorne's freshly dug grave in St Stephen's cemetery. She had worshipped at the parish for most of her sixty years, and it had played a pivotal role in her life, albeit not of a religious nature. Curiosity was shared by all who made the pilgrimage, though motives were more varied. The pious paid the respects of their generation. Others came simply to look, exchange gossip from behind parasol and lace. Whispers competed with the crunch of gravel underfoot.



The *Sydney Morning Herald* spread the news and reported doings and events from a modest building in Sydney's central district. It prided itself on being the publication of record, and assiduously continued to maintain this role as the decades rolled by. The paper adopted the style of the staid formats of London's press. News of cattle sales, general auctions, the arrival of vessels and the cargo they carried, social events and death notices shared page one with accounts of murder, theft, accidents and mayhem. Much later the *Herald* would become affectionately known as 'Granny'.

The paper's editor Bertram Jones considered Colbert Moore to be a typical example of a square peg in a round hole. Moore would

have been the first to agree. He was ahead of his time, a newshound who sought to wrap his reports in atmosphere, colour, drama and, whenever possible, human interest. His sometimes graphic and confronting writing style would become the bread and butter of tabloids of the future, the appearance of which was to await the years following the dawning of the next century, itself almost two decades away.

Moore's current mission was to unravel the story of Camperdown Lodge and those who had lived in it. His editor had other ideas. As Moore sat at his desk, pondering where he might start, his musings were cut short by the appearance of his editor.

Bertram Jones took in Moore, the sole occupant of the room. 'Ah. Mr Moore. All alone are we?'

Moore knew that when the editor employed the honorific 'Mr' he should tread warily.

Jones came straight to the issue. 'I trust you have completed the shipping list. Now that you are clearly relaxing?'

'Er, just about to, Mr Jones,' Moore lied unconvincingly.

Bertram Jones was unimpressed. 'May I remind you, Mr Moore, that we cannot go to press unless and until I have the list complete and updated.'

Moore's demeanor could not disguise his lack of enthusiasm. This prompted Jones to launch into his oft-repeated homily. 'I would also like to remind you that the shipping list is the most widely and consistently read item we publish. Its important role in informing readers of goods, vessels and persons scheduled for arrival and departure ...' As Jones delivered the sermon, in his earnestness he failed to notice the slight movement of Moore's lips as he mimed the speech in cadence with his editor, '... are of social and financial significance,' Jones finally concluded, adding, 'Things that you clearly fail to grasp.'

Moore noticed Jones held a piece of copy paper in his hand. It

looked familiar. 'I see you have the piece I filed on the forthcoming auction of Camperdown Lodge at Newtown.'

Jones shrugged. 'I understand it's almost a ruin,' he sniffed, annoyed at Moore's attempt to change the subject of his mission again. 'The four paragraphs I have, along with the price it fetches on Saturday, should be sufficient for the record.'

Moore could scarcely believe it. 'I believe there is a most promising and important story to be had, Mr Jones. A colourful story about interesting lives. Perhaps for an inside page feature.'

Jones shook his head, well accustomed to Moore's enthusiasm for what he believed were mostly dead ends or lost causes. 'Colourful! Oh, yes, a designation for something with little or no news value. Wonderful.'

Moore persevered. 'It's an approach that has found much favour in the American press. It's said to give more substance to issues for readers.'

'Then pray let us hope that it stays with our American cousins, Mr Moore.' Jones turned to take his leave. The subject was closed.

Moore made one more try. 'It shouldn't take long to piece it all together. The story behind a socially prominent woman, locked away in self-exile for four decades ...'

Jones had reached the door. He called, without looking back, 'You are not to waste your time. And I want that shipping list.'

Moore sank back in his chair. Not for the first time in his dealings with the editor, he considered resigning.



Five miles away at Camperdown Lodge, progress had been made by the clean-up gangs. But auctioneer Edward French decided that more time was needed to make the old mansion suitably presentable. Therefore auction day was put back to the following Wednesday,

13 October, to commence at 11 AM sharp. A notice of the change appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which reported that, on instructions of the executors, terms for contents would be cash with no reserve prices. The main residence would be sold by auction and, if needs be, subsequent negotiation.

Much of the interior gloom had been ameliorated by removing the damaged shutters and flinging open those in good repair. Nevertheless, the look of neglect persisted. Some wood-panelled walls were covered in etchings, paintings and tapestries, on which were pasted lot numbers, some askew, all clamouring for attention. Serving plates, silverware, fine porcelain, crystal, wine goblets, decanters, engraved cutlery, all sporting numbers like orphans awaiting a new home, were piled on tables. In the formal rooms, suites, living and utility areas, furniture—including display cases, carved sideboards, some mahogany tables, elegant chairs on shapely legs, a grand piano, bookcases, beds, desks—were arranged, along with kitchen paraphernalia and other items that had been rescued from the clutches of decay. Outside on the freshly cut grass a large podium had been erected, covered by a gaily striped canopy. It provided a carnival-like touch. Cold drinks and other refreshments for the anticipated horde of attendees would be served at the podium.

And come they did. From early in the day a line of carriages clip-clopped to the gates, with a brief pause to allow their occupants to alight, then moved on, promptly replaced by the next in the seemingly endless procession. All classes were represented: formally attired, cloth-cap working-class, usually trailed by a tribe of children; business types, traders and tradesmen on the lookout for tools for their professions; elegant females; labourers in shirtsleeves. A pack of dogs scampered among the feet, yelping, barking, squabbling, excited by the activity. The crowd's progress was slowed on the driveway, halted by those ahead, who were squeezing, pushing and jostling for admission at the main entrance. The buzz of the crowd was punctuated by raised voices,

shouts, laughter, coughing, mothers seeking to restrain exuberant offspring, others remonstrating at the behaviour of the canines.



The crowds outside Camperdown Lodge continued to grow. Many people had a glimmer of what might follow, having lined the streets to watch the progress of Eliza's hearse drawn by four black horses, her flower-bedecked casket just visible through the etched window glass. The hearse was trailed by a carriage bearing the elderly Bailey sisters, maids to the mansion's late mistress, followed by a string of carriages representing the estate's accountant, solicitors, a long-serving business adviser and the clergy. Farther down the line the carriages contained some surviving friends and business associates of Eliza's long-dead father, Judge James Donnithorne. As the cortege slowly made its way down King Street to St Stephen's Church and cemetery, elders stood in silence, many with bowed heads, and paid their respects. Others had come to satisfy idle curiosity. Local children ran in the wake of the vehicles, revelling in the attention as they became part of the procession. Although few of those present had ever met Eliza Donnithorne, the impact of her passing and the activities unfolding before them, helped some convince themselves that they had some link with the late mistress and her brooding secretive mansion—or at least with someone who claimed such an association.

At the cemetery the funeral proceedings were watched by crowds, mostly sheltered behind trees and headstones, keeping a respectful distance from the grave site. The more audacious mixed with the official mourners, taking up positions behind the black-garbed Bailey sisters, pressing closer as the casket was lowered into the wound that had been carved into the earth.

The sun had slipped behind darkening clouds when the cortege first arrived at St Stephen's. The rumblings of an approaching storm

grew closer and some words of solace intoned by Canon Taylor were lost to many of those present. As the first sods clumped onto the polished coffin lid, a boom of thunder seemed to shake the very ground itself. The spring was suddenly dead, the air chilled. A few of the devout made the sign of the cross. Others exchanged glances. Surely, it was a sign? There was little more time left for conjecture, uttered or whispered, as another roll of thunder crackled overhead.

Out of the now purple sky came the first icy fingers of rain that swept in on wind gusts. The rattle of an approaching deluge could not be ignored. The rain hissed down and mourners and interlopers scattered from the cemetery, at first walking, then hurrying, then running.

Canon Taylor brought his sermon to a hurried and improvised conclusion. He glanced anxiously at the Bailey sisters, who stood their ground, resembling a pair of black spectres in the increasing blur of the downpour. The reverend told himself he should respect their devotion and privacy, and turned to walk towards some shelter. Since there was no longer anyone present to witness his departure, he, too, broke into a run along the flooding path that led to the church building, holding his cassock to speed his flight. The drama of the funeral was the curtain raiser for the final act in what had become a cipher for the end of an era: the day of the auction.

Chapter Two

Stanley Watts stood by the open gates, watching the growing crowd streaming up the drive to the mansion. He was feeling rather pleased with himself. He had been retained to continue as watchman until the sale of Camperdown Lodge was settled, the paperwork done, contracts exchanged, the price paid, and the keys in possession of a new owner. He had feared that the paint-daubed wall might have brought him undone, especially as his efforts to clean up the mess had resulted in an ugly smear across the brickwork. He resorted to concealing it with an auction sign. His Cockney resourcefulness had saved his position as guardian of Camperdown Lodge.

Now he was instructed to keep a close eye on those attending the auction, and to take control of any unruly or inappropriate behaviour. Not exactly confident he could handle trouble in such a horde, Watts settled for standing by the gate, legs spread, hands clasped behind his back, his bowler pulled down to partially obscure his face, and his truncheon in full view. It was an authoritarian pose practised before a mirror, and hopefully it lent a stern demeanour to his appearance.

Watts's attention was attracted to a familiar figure in the throng shuffling through the gates. It was the journalist he had met the previous week. 'Mr Moore,' he called, 'Are you still looking for a story?'

Moore paused to eye the watchman, who had not been very helpful at their previous encounter. 'Are you still attending to matters of safekeeping?'

Watts puffed up, nodded his head. 'I am, Mr Moore.'

'Then be sure to keep the likes of Mr Edward Kelly and his companions away, lest they be bearing paint brushes.'

Watts removed his bowler and scratched his head as Moore became lost in the crowd. He came to the conclusion that he had not made a favourable impression on the journalist. With a shrug, he replaced the bowler, careful that it once again obscured his upper features.

Within Camperdown Lodge every available space was crammed with people impatient for the proceedings to commence. Canon Taylor elbowed his way through the throng, relying on his clerical dog-collar to help part the waves of the multitude. He came upon the Bailey sisters sitting in a corner of the parlour, still clad in black mourning. They looked lost and unheeded, relegated to witnesses in a house that had been their home for over forty years. Sarah Bailey acknowledged the reverend's arrival with a slight nod from beneath her veil. Her sister Elizabeth motioned him to be seated beside them.

'I understand this is a trying time for you, dear ladies, since Miss Eliza meant very much to you,' he began.

Her veil provided Elizabeth with the courage to express her thoughts to such an eminent person as the canon. 'It might appear heartless, sir,' she said, 'but in my heart I'm relieved that it's over. Now we can hope she can rest.'

Canon Taylor was surprised. This was the first time either of the servants had expressed such a direct opinion about anything to do with their late mistress. 'Despite her own trials and tribulations she did not forsake you—such was her goodness and generosity.'

'That is true, sir,' Sarah ventured. 'We are going to move to the home she bequeathed us.'

'I understand the cottage is in Lennox Street,' he said. 'You should be comfortable there.'

'That's true, Reverend,' said Elizabeth, 'but Camperdown Lodge has been our home almost since we arrived in Sydney as young girls.'

Canon Taylor nodded. 'All changes in life pose their own challenges. Look upon the home as a reward—for Mistress Eliza's love and gratitude for your years of devotion and loyal service.'

'Yes, she has done her time in Hell, sir, and now deserves her reward in Heaven. Let's hope she receives it,' said Elizabeth.

Encouraged by her sister's words, Sarah turned to the clergyman. She indicated the activity and noise around them. 'What hurts so much is the gossip and curiosity. They won't let her rest in peace.'

Canon Taylor nodded sympathetically, an idea forming for a sermon on the evils of injustice and gossip. It was not only a good idea for next Sunday but, in its own way, topical, relevant to the local community. 'I am sure she will indeed find peace, free of worldly worries, which Miss Eliza so richly deserves,' he said.



The crowd outside parted to admit Edward French and his two clerks. The trio, wearing black top hats and business suits, marched in single file, no doubt conscious of their role as main players in the theatre of the auction, upon which the curtain was about to be raised.

Further conversation between Canon Taylor and the Baileys was ended by the arrival of the auctioneer and his assistants in the parlour. They took their places at a podium, which had been designed to be wheeled from room to room if so required.

The room was silenced by a sharp rap of Edward French's gavel. He looked around the room, studying those present, making an initial assessment of what the market might bear, and nodding curtly to a few dealers, notables and gentlemen of substance who, based on previous encounters, were likely to contribute to his percentage.

Then, in his best town-crier's voice, Auctioneer French drew in a deep breath and launched into his role. 'My lords, ladies and gentlemen,' he began. 'Acting in accordance with the instructions

of Colonel Edward Donnithorne, of Colne Lodge, in the Royal borough of Twickenham, London, brother of the late Eliza Emily Donnithorne, formerly of Camperdown Lodge, in the parish of Newtown, Sydney, in the colony of New South Wales, I am instructed to dispose through auction, of all the worldly possessions of the said Eliza Emily Donnithorne, the proceeds of which, are to be received by the said Colonel Edward Donnithorne.'

And so it began. One after another the old mansion's contents—rare, precious, priceless, utilitarian and frivolous—went under the hammer. Edward French's cheeks became flushed from his efforts, as he eliminated the inventory, item by item, navigating the list that had been chartered for him in the precise copperplate handwriting of his clerks. His assistants sat on stools, flanking their master, taking down details of prices and buyers with long quill pens.

As the auctioneer's voice droned on, rising and falling, backed by the rapping of his gavel, the room grew more and more humid from the warmth of pressing bodies. Saran and Elizabeth Bailey sat tight, holding their composure, as items that held special memories were allocated new owners and left their lives for ever. Elizabeth managed to maintain her composure, but her older sister did not.

Then the time arrived for the liquidation of items that were special and much loved by their late mistress, perhaps more than any others in the house. The library had been acquired over the years, and it included many rare books, although they were all special to the woman who had assembled the collection.

Edward French soothed his dry throat with some cool water, then placed his now-empty glass to one side. He took a deep breath and resumed his task. 'We shall now deal with lots 60 through to 350,' he began, 'which should be of interest to many. Especially those who enjoy or deal in fine books. Most are leather-bound volumes, many extremely rare. The library collection of the Donnithorne residence has been recognised as one of the finest in the colony.'

Sarah had heard enough. She clambered to her feet, watched by a concerned Elizabeth and an uneasy Canon Taylor. 'She loved those books,' she cried. 'It just doesn't seem right.'

She turned away, breaking into deep sobs, tears streaming from beneath her veil. All attention had switched to Sarah, and curious witnesses to her distress stood aside so she could leave. Edward French, dumbfounded, went to open his mouth to continue but, his audience lost, decided against it.

Elizabeth trailed after her sister, motioning the reverend to remain seated. Another person in the crowd followed the Bailey sisters. With a few excuse-me-pleases, Colbert Moore edged through the press of bodies in the wake of Elizabeth and Sarah.

The sisters found refuge in the long dining room, which had not yet been invaded by the auctioneer and his followers. They settled into high-backed chairs in the vast chamber. There was little in the room but the long banquet table and rows of flanking chairs, a far cry from past times when it was the scene of glittering occasions when Judge James Donnithorne was entertaining in lavish style. James had been a generous host to the famous, wealthy colonial governors and administrators, visiting English nobility, bejewelled women of fashion and leading business and society figures of the day.

It seemed inconceivable that all this should come to an end. It was ironic that it was all the result of probably the most extravagant event ever planned for the high-vaulted reception room.

But, like the memory of a long past high summer, the winter chill of night had settled upon the mansion. The following sleep of four decades all but eliminated memories of how it had once been, except for a few who had experienced the full splendour of Camperdown Lodge—and even for them the details were faded, like flowers pressed between the pages of a seldom-opened family album.

Sarah's sobs subsided. She raised her eyes and looked about the room over the handkerchief pressed to her face. Until a few weeks

previously, it was a room that she had not entered for more than forty years.

Elizabeth followed her gaze, sensing what must have been passing through her sister's mind. The drone of the auctioneer's voice and the responding cries of bidders were muted now and then lost as the former servants took in the room. To Elizabeth it all seemed like yesterday when a lavish bridal feast had been laid out in the chamber, on the table at which she and Sarah were seated. The rows of vacant chairs stood as though waiting expectantly for the wedding party and guests. In her mind's eye, Elizabeth could still see it all. Starched linen, polished silverware which she and Sarah had slaved over, fine plates ringed in gold, glassware from Venice, and chilled wines and champagne in pewter and silver-crested buckets, frosted and crammed with ice, especially shipped in by fast packet. Fine porcelain plates were bordered by silver cutlery with the Donnithorne crest in 22-carat gold. And while cold entrées were already laid down the centre of the extended table, the aromas of roast beef, suckling pig, turkeys and chickens, freshly baked breads, steaming soups and stews wafted through from the distant kitchens where three chefs and a dozen or more assistants toiled in the steaming haze—it had been just as well that none of them knew that their creations were destined never to be eaten. Only squeaking hordes of mice, glossy cockroaches, worms and spiders spinning their webs were to devour the feast and its trappings.

Elizabeth gathered herself back to the present. She decided to lift Sarah's mood. 'Well, it will soon be over ... and then we can put all this where it belongs. In the past.' Sarah shook her head, unconvinced.

Elizabeth pressed on. 'That's where it all belongs, Sarah. We must be strong. That's what she would have expected.'

Sarah turned, reacting with surprise. Elizabeth, curious, craned around to look. Colbert Moore had entered the room and was standing by the doorway. The Baileys were taken aback by the intrusion.

Moore smiled reassuringly. 'Do I have the honour of addressing Miss Sarah and Miss Elizabeth Bailey?'

Elizabeth rose from her chair, watched by Sarah. 'You will find the proceedings are elsewhere. Not here.'

'I'm not here to bid for your late mistress's belongings,' Moore replied.

Elizabeth was in no state to tolerate curious interlopers, which the young man obviously was. 'Oh, I see. You're not the only one who is here for the entertainment!' she snapped.

Moore smiled again. 'That description does not really fit me, Miss Bailey. I'm sorry to intrude upon your grief at this time, but please let me explain why I am here.'

Sarah, still seated, was suspicious. The young man was too self-assured for her liking.

Elizabeth remained coldly unimpressed. 'Just who are you? And what is your business with us?' she demanded, eyeing the bell cord that hung near the wall, debating whether she ought to terminate the conversation here and now. Although it was many years since anyone would have appeared in response to the tinkling bell, which would have sounded in the distant servants' station. But for the duration of the auction help should be at hand, albeit from one of the auctioneer's hirelings.

Colbert Moore noticed the bell cord and seemed to read her thoughts. 'My name is Colbert Moore and I'm a journalist,' he began. 'I am here to cover the sale of the estate at the bidding of my editor.'

'A journalist!' Elizabeth was dumbstruck. Sarah rose and stood beside her sister. 'What business is Miss Donnithorne's estate to the likes of you?' Elizabeth's voice rose in both indignation and anger.

Moore shrugged, keeping his voice soft and persuasive, or at least he hoped he was. 'Well, I'm a local myself. I was born and raised over in Bishopgate Street. So, having grown up in Newtown, I could hardly fail to be aware of the, er, speculation concerning Camperdown Lodge ... and your late mistress.'

Elizabeth pursed her lips, preparing to sending the young man on his way. Yet she hesitated, annoyed with her own curiosity at what might really be behind the appearance of the journalist.

Moore sensed that her guard had been lowered, at least for a moment, and pushed ahead. 'I'm told that it's almost forty years since this house has been open to anyone other than those who lived here; namely your good self, your sister and, of course, your late mistress.'

Elizabeth and Sarah exchanged glances, as if to establish who should be the one to end the conversation.

Moore sensed he was fast running out of time and needed to snag the attention of the Bailey sisters. 'I honestly believe that now is the time to put things to rights,' he said.

'What on earth are you talking about, sir?' Sarah demanded.

'Surely there must be an end to the malicious gossip, the ignorant and destructive rumours, unfounded speculation, from those who are driven by envy and curiosity. Only the truth would end all this,' Moore added.

Elizabeth shook her head. 'An impressive little speech, Mr Moore. But this has nothing to do with you. We have heard enough. Now please take your leave. Or I should be obliged to summons assistance.' To emphasis her resolve, Elizabeth reached over and gripped the bell cord.

Moore knew he had failed and was frustrated at himself for not doing better. 'Very well,' he said quietly, 'as you wish, ladies. But please remember this: lies that remain unchallenged become accepted as the truths of history.' It was a line he'd heard in a speech somewhere and he hoped it might impress the Bailey sisters as much as it had him.

Elizabeth raised the cord to signal that Moore's time had run out. He fumbled in his top pocket and fished out a card, which he held out to Elizabeth. 'This is where I can be reached. In case you decide to put the record straight.'

Elizabeth let the card spiral to the floor.

With a short bow, Moore turned and strode to the door, towards the sounds of the auction.



Colbert Moore filed his account of the auction at Camperdown Lodge and its contents, a rather short piece which identified the items that had brought the highest prices and the monetary fate of the mansion—which was still subject to some final negotiations before the deeds of transfer could be drawn up by the solicitors waiting in the wings.

He wrote another article about the notables, well-known traders and business figures who had attended the auction. This was Bertram Jones's idea. The editor was conscious that these people took out regular advertisements concerning their goods, services and expertise, and he saw this as a way of repaying them in kind, with their names and activities captured in ink for posterity.

A man of few words, unless the short fuse of his temper was ignited, Editor Jones accepted Moore's copy with a curt perusal and grunted acknowledgement. He stomped to his office and placed it in a growing pile of papers marked with typefaces and font sizes for the printer downstairs, who was waiting for the contents and layout sheets of the upcoming issue.

Moore was still convinced that Camperdown Lodge had not been covered as it might, that the real story was yet to be written. Elizabeth and Sarah Bailey's hostility and their defensiveness had reinforced his conviction that the house was the centre of a drama that had little to do with the auction. That Elizabeth was a tough old bird, he concluded. Somehow he needed to find a way to convince the pair to tell the story of those lost forty years and what had led up to them. Otherwise the truth would go to the grave with Elizabeth and her sister.

Of course he had lied about his growing up in Bishopgate Street

but, as with many things involved in journalism, sometimes harmless white lies were helpful. He needed to establish a relationship, seemingly a more personal reason, to make it easier for the Baileys to speak about their late mistress. There had to be some way, a key to unlock the door, though it escaped him.

Later, satisfied that the editor had departed for the day, Moore leaned back in his squeaky chair, crossed his boots on a corner of his paper-littered desk, folding his arms behind his head. It was a most relaxing pose, one that always helped him think more fruitfully. However, that form of creative musing was out of the question when Bertram Jones was in residence. The sight of scuffed leather boots on desks was enough to unleash a verbal tirade that was truly wondrous to behold—unless you were on the receiving end, that is.

He mulled over the details of his encounter—or confrontation—with the Bailey sisters. Moore conjured up each word, each defensive move, which in itself suggested that the elderly retainers were not comfortable about being the keepers of secrets.

Moore had not noticed that outside the window rain had been falling steadily for some time. The sound of footsteps on the stairway brought him back to the present. He hurriedly withdrew his boots from the desk, sending most of the papers fluttering to the floor. A glance at the stand by the door revealed an umbrella still in its place. It belonged to the editor.



Canon Taylor stood in the warmth of the late afternoon sun and watched the two stonemasons at work around the mound of earth that marked Eliza Donnithorne's resting place. It was next to the sealed and well-established section of her father James, who had lain alone for decades. The graves were being joined together. The phrase 'united in death' came to the clergyman's mind as he took in the many

wilting floral tributes which the stonemasons had heaped on James's grave while they went about their work.

Deep in contemplation, Canon Taylor was not aware of the arrival of another spectator until the young man stood almost alongside him. He turned and acknowledged the newcomer with a friendly nod. 'You were acquainted with the deceased?' he enquired.

Colbert Moore smiled. 'No, reverend. I'm just paying my respects to a woman who I understand was quite remarkable.'

Taylor turned back to observe the craftsmen. 'She was a fine lady,' he said softly, as if to himself. He paused, then added, 'And from a remarkable family.'

Moore looked impressed and nodded, prompting the reverend to elaborate.

Canon Taylor spread his hands, as if to embrace their surroundings. 'What you see here is in great measure thanks to the goodness of James Donnithorne.'

'Really?'

'Indeed, yes, young man,' the clergyman said. 'When the church required extensive renovations, Mr Donnithorne was very generous. And Miss Eliza, too, was engaged in good works.'

Colbert Moore attempted to offer an appropriate rejoinder. 'And now they are together.'

The reverend lowered his head. 'Let us pray that they have found the peace they so richly deserve.'

Moore sensed there might have been a message in the clergyman's comment. 'It, um, eluded them in life?'

Canon Taylor studied Moore for a few moments, now a shade cautious. 'I don't believe we have met ... Mr?'

'It's Moore, sir. Colbert Moore.'

'Well, Mr Moore, life's journey is not always as we might wish. Things do happen, often without warning, and lives can be changed forever.'

Intrigued, Moore hoped he might be on to something, though the clergyman may simply have been generalising. He decided to try and keep the man of God talking. 'I feel sure they each must have derived much comfort by their close association with this fine church, and the solace it would have offered.'

Canon Taylor nodded gravely. 'The church may be reasonably new but the parish of St Stephen's is almost ninety years old. One of the colony's finest,' he added proudly.

Moore assumed a demeanor of being impressed. 'Really? How interesting. And I suppose the records of its history and other things are safely archived?'

The reverend smiled at the opportunity to indulge in his favourite secular subject. 'Indeed they are, Mr Moore. The record keeping was begun many years ago by one of my predecessors, the Reverend Andrew Kemp, who was devoted to the task.'

Moore sensed a small ray of hope in the way the conversation was heading. 'So I take it that all births, deaths and marriages are available for reference?'

Canon Taylor shook his head. 'No. Christenings, deaths and marriages,' he said, a touch pedantically, although Moore took his point, nodding acknowledgement. Taylor fumbled at his smock jacket and produced a fob watch and chain. 'Tempus fugit, I'm afraid. Despite what many seem to believe, we priests do not work solely on the Sabbath, Mr Moore,' he smiled.

Moore shrugged. This was another dead lead. 'Yes, I should be going too, sir.'

They walked towards the church building and the gates beyond. As they approached the gravel pathway that led to King Street and the church steps, Moore tried once more to get the clergyman to elaborate on how things might have been within the Donnithorne household. Because of the family's close association with St Stephen's, he would have been the person to know the situation. 'By the way,' Moore asked,

casually, 'would the church records include the marriage banns that would have been posted over the years?'

Canon Taylor shrugged. 'The banns? No, I'm afraid not.'

Moore was surprised. 'I should have imagined those who have declared their intention to wed before the congregation would also be included in the records.'

Taylor came to a stop, smiled indulgently. 'It is true that banns are posted before the congregation on three occasions prior to the intended nuptials, but they are, as you rightly say, intentions. Nothing more.'

They had reached the gates and Moore did his best to mask disappointment, although the reverend was oblivious to what had been an interrogation, albeit a subtle one.

'People have a change of mind, of heart,' Canon Taylor added. 'Or unforeseen events can intervene. Sometimes quite tragically.'

Moore nodded and accepted that another door had been closed on his efforts to get some kind of lead.

As if divining his thoughts, Taylor added, 'Good intentions are said to sometimes pave the road to Hell, eh?'

Moore proffered his hand. 'It's been a pleasure to meet you, sir. Now I must be off to the office.'

'And which office might be that?'

Moore hesitated, now trapped. He accepted it was own-up time. 'It's the ... *Sydney Morning Herald*.'

Canon Taylor watched Moore walk away on King Street. He had been talking to a journalist! He tried to recall the conversation, what he might have said.



Over recent days the Bailey sisters had become busy settling into the cottage bequeathed to them, at 63 Lennox Street, not far from

St Stephen's. They were also in receipt of a stipend: modest, though sufficient to support their needs for the remainder of their lives.

It had been a wrench for Sarah and Elizabeth to bid farewell to Camperdown Lodge. The former servants had kept their quarters and their mistress's suite in clean and tolerable condition, as was the kitchen. These were isolated outposts, maintaining remnants of former civilisation amid the desolation of cobwebbed chambers, peeling wallpaper, furniture draped in grimy shrouds. Now they were comfortably settled in their own house with the chore of moving completed, thoughts of the events and life they had left behind returned to stir memories, of the earlier happy days and those sadder ones that followed.

Elizabeth had been wrestling with her own demon, which had been planted by the pushy young journalist at the auction. She wanted to tell Sarah what she was thinking. But she hesitated. She knew that her sister had instinctively disliked Colbert Moore, even though he had succeeded in leaving an impression. She was usually the more assertive of the pair—Sarah mostly supported her ideas and decisions so far as their joint interests were concerned—but Elizabeth decided that this was one issue she should discuss with her sister.

Time was passing and perhaps Moore had been right and the record should be put straight on what had happened to Eliza Donnithorne and her father and to others who had been involved in their lives.

Sarah listened to her younger sister in silence. Only the pursing of her thin lips and the occasional sharp intake of breath indicated the emotions within.

Finally Elizabeth was done, concluding, 'You know the journalist is right, as much as I hate to admit it. Once we are gone there will be no one else. Then ... well, it will be just what others choose to say—and invent.'

Sarah faltered. 'But should we trust him? Is this Moore person the one we can confide in?'

Elizabeth shrugged. 'Who else is there?'

The silence which followed was made all the more acute by the ticking of a clock on the kitchen wall, another legacy of Eliza Donnithorne's last will and testament.

Chapter Three

With the day of the auction well past, Colbert Moore was once again saddled with the detested shipping list which was so important to his editor. The column was mostly culled from notices of various agents and traders, and the required format was to build it around individuals. In another age it would be described as a gossip column. Moore rapped out the final words on his heavy typewriter, then screwed the page from the rachety roller. He leaned back and scanned his efforts, searching for literals and other blemishes before conveying it to Bertram Jones, who would zealously go through the copy and the names of socialites, government functionaries, traders and returning businessmen, and the items in short supply or much demand.

Moore was debating whether or not the coast was clear to relax in his chair when Simpson, the paper's sole cadet journalist, appeared. Simpson held an envelope in one hand which he paused to study, standing before Moore's cluttered desk. 'This was left on my desk by mistake,' he announced. 'Looks like it was intended for you, Moore.'

Moore looked up and reached out for the envelope. Simpson held it beyond his reach, still perusing it. 'Just hand it over, Simpson, then get back to your broom,' said Moore, weary of the cadet's characteristic crass behaviour.

Simpson displayed the surprise of discovery as he continued to eye the envelope. 'I say, old chap. It has the fine spidery handwriting

of a woman. Perhaps the young lady's father has found out about you. He might even sue.'

Moore straightened up and reached for his ink well. Simpson knew from experience that a missile was about to be launched in his direction. He dropped the envelope onto Moore's desk and with a raucous laugh he scuttled off. Moore shook his head in disgust. Simpson was a mere cadet who would have to be taught more respect for his seniors.

From among the littered desk Moore located his brass letter opener and slit open the envelope. He fished out a single page, with a brief sniff to determine perfume. As he read the contents a slow smile lit his face. The message was succinct, but to the point:

*Mr Colbert Moore, Esquire
Journalist, c/o the Sydney Morning Herald,
Bridge Street,
Sydney.*

Dear Mr Moore,

My sister and I have had time to consider your reasons for placing on record certain matters pertaining to our late Mistress and other things related thereto. Should you be interested in pursuing these and other issues, you may call on us at our place of abode, situated at 63 Lennox St., Newtown, promptly at 10.30 in the forenoon of this coming Saturday.

*Yours sincerely,
Sarah and Elizabeth Bailey*

Moore reread the note, absorbing each word. 'Well, what do you know ...' he breathed quietly to himself. He gave out a triumphant yell and tossed the note into the air.

Simpson and two other journalists tapping away on their typewriters broke off their efforts, staring in astonishment. Editor Jones appeared at his office door.



Saturday dawned slowly for three souls in Sydney Town. Colbert Moore had been up since sunrise. Standing before the mirror in his Lower George Street lodgings, he rehearsed a speech, first taking a deep breath, adopting what he hoped was a reassuring and persuasive demeanor.

Moore spoke with a slow delivery, for maximum effect. 'There is one thing that I should expect of you both,' he told his image in the glass, 'and it is this: despite your commendable loyalty to your late mistress, Miss Eliza, please do not permit what you tell me, in any way, to colour or detract from the truth, as you know it in your hearts.'

He pulled a face. 'Hmm. A shade too theatrical. Lacks spontaneity.'

Moore's carriage drew to a stop behind its two snorting horses at 63 Lennox Street precisely two minutes before 10.30 AM. In a mixture of impatience, enthusiasm and what he told himself was professional dedication, he had arrived in the borough of Newtown much earlier, and had whiled away the time by instructing the driver to tour some back streets and much of the length of King Street. Hang the expense. After all, this could be something special. At least, he hoped so.

Moore clambered down from the carriage, paid off the driver, and took in his surroundings. Number 63 was a small cottage, much like its neighbours, which stood close to the unpaved dusty street. A few children were playing noisy games with the uninhibited exuberance of youth. Two stray dogs tried to join in the fun.

With a final look at his watch, Moore opened the Baileys' small wooden gate.

Elizabeth was at the door. 'Please come in, Mr Moore,' she invited, with a fleeting, formal smile.

He was ushered into a small parlour where Sarah was waiting. She indicated a vacant chair. 'Please be seated.'

Now that it looked like things were about to happen at last, Moore experienced an uncharacteristic attack of butterflies. Sarah went off in the direction of what Moore assumed might be the kitchen, from where the aroma of freshly baked bread wafted.

'You will take tea, Mr Moore,' Elizabeth announced, making it more of a statement than a question.

'Oh, please do not go to any trouble on my ...' Moore began.

Elizabeth, glancing at the wall clock, cut him short. 'It's time for tea. We always have it at this hour.' Her tone was polite, neither friendly nor unfriendly.

While waiting for Sarah to return, they engaged in some awkward exchanges.

Moore decided he had to find a way to break down the reserve if he were to achieve any satisfactory results. Sarah finally arrived, bearing a tray of teacups, a pot and a large plate of freshly baked bread. It was a signal to begin the business that had brought him to the small cottage.

'Well, where do you think we ought to start, Mr Moore?' Elizabeth asked, as if on cue.

He took a bite of a piece of the bread and smiled nervously. 'I understand that you ladies are originally from Essex.'

Elizabeth nodded. 'We left when barely into our teens. To work for an English judge in a faraway place. We never went back. And what of you ... Mr Moore?'

Moore shrugged a smile. 'Mother was born in Livingstone, a village near Edinburgh. And my father was from Steel, a hamlet just

inland from Newcastle. He worked there for the Alexander family, who were well-respected shipowners. They lived in a grand residence named Black Hall. I understand the Alexanders are still there.'

Sarah smiled broadly. 'That means you are part Geordie and part Scot.' She looked to her sister, and nodded as if to confirm that Elizabeth was to do most of the talking.

'It's quite a complex story, I suppose,' Elizabeth began, 'and I'm not sure just where to start.'

'Why not at the beginning, when you first met Mistress Eliza and her father. Anything that comes into your mind,' Moore prompted. 'If you raise any issue that I need elaborated, then I'll simply ask.'

Moore produced a small pocket case which contained some folded sheafs of paper and a number of sharpened pencils tied in a neat bundle with cord. 'You will understand that I shall need to take notes?'

The Bailey sisters nodded and waited for the journalist to set up his writing arrangements. He looked up and inclined his head for her to commence.

'I remember it was cool and windy. Sarah and I were so nervous, about to meet our new master,' she began. 'The fact that he was a judge and well known made us more anxious.'



The year was 1838. The two girls had only recently arrived in the country, and were waiting to meet and take up positions in the service of a prominent English family who were coming to live in the colony. Elizabeth and Sarah stood on a crowded wharf at Sydney Cove, awaiting the docking of a vessel that was making her way slowly up the harbour, with minimum canvas aloft, tacking gingerly in the gusting wind. The square-rigged *Emerald Isle* pitched and yawed on the wind-chopped waters as the last of its sails were furled.

Passengers lined the deck, expectant, excited faces, many seeing a new and alien land for the first time. Most were working-class, and there were families, some young men and a number of children.

It was the end of a long and weary voyage from England, with a short stopover in Calcutta. During the voyage some twenty souls had been lost and buried at sea. For those on board, the arrival in a safe haven of promise symbolised some renewal and obliterated the memories of witnessing the bodies splashing to their watery graves, secure in canvas shrouds stitched together by the ship's sailmaker.

While in Calcutta taking aboard fresh supplies and additional cargo, a dozen passengers joined the *Emerald Isle*. They included James Donnithorne, the 65-year-old retired judge and former senior administrator of the British East India Company, his daughter, Eliza Emily, who was eleven, and James's Anglo-Indian secretary Charles Vashi Larkman.

It was to be a truly new start for the Donnithornes following the loss of James's wife, Sarah, and two daughters, Penelope and Catherine, sixteen and eighteen respectively, who had fallen victims of India's great cholera plague of 1832. Now a successful businessman, on previous visits to Sydney James had invested in country estates and city real estate, including Camperdown Lodge, an imposing mansion on the southwestern outskirts of Sydney.

From the deck of the *Emerald Isle*, James gazed shorewards, his hands resting protectively on Eliza's shoulders. The girl's golden hair and vivid blue eyes established she had inherited her father's good looks. A postcard-portrait of an English girl of means and privilege.

James gave her a gentle squeeze of reassurance. 'Take a good look, my child. This is to be our new home.'

The Bailey sisters scanned the vessel's crowded decks as the ship eased to a stop, still pitching in the gusting northeasterly. They tried to work out who, among the press of passengers, might be their new master and his young daughter.

The harbour master and the captain considered it useless to continue a docking exercise in the running tide and the stiff wind that showed no signs of remission. The *Emerald Isle* was let drift farther out from the shoreline where her rattling anchor chains splashed into the lumpy green waters. The anchors bit into the mud and the vessel swung about and stabilised, her bow head on to the wind.

James had been watching the proceedings with interest. He caught the attention of First Officer Glanville who was pushing through the crowded deck. Glanville paused by James and Eliza. 'Looks like we'll remain out in the stream, Your Honour,' he shrugged. 'It's a rather flukey wind on a run-out tide.'

James knew the answer to his next question, but asked it anyway. 'Does this mean we shall be obliged to take to the boats?'

Glanville was apologetic. 'Afraid so. We have little choice.' He was slightly taken aback when James smiled broadly.

'Just think,' James began, 'we've come all this way. Now we're about to take to the lifeboats a couple of cables' length from our destination.'

'Never even thought 'bout it like that, sir,' said Glanville, relieved that the ship's most distinguished passenger was taking the turn of events with such good humour. 'Now, if you'll excuse me. Time to start organising those boats.'

Eliza was excited by the news. 'Are we going in the small boats, Papa?'

James brushed his hand over Eliza's hair, noting his young daughter's taste for adventure. 'It looks like it, my girl.'

The third member of the Donnithorne party appeared from the crowd. Vashi Larkman, a darkly handsome man, gazed at the world through uncharacteristically blue eyes, a sign of his Anglo genes. Those who knew the Donnithornes considered Vashi was more a shadow to his master than a secretary, since he was utterly devoted to James and his welfare. It was an accurate description. For twenty

years he had been on call, accompanying James wherever he went on his extended travels, at first handling business and domestic arrangements, later more personal needs and activities that affected James and the Donnithorne household.

The tall, distinguished Englishman of means and the self-confident Anglo-Indian made an impact wherever they went. They had become close over the years. Vashi was almost an accepted member of the household, though more in the eyes of the father than his daughter. There was always a cool and polite distance between Vashi and Eliza, stemming more from the latter's intuition than anything else. Vashi inwardly fretted that he would always remain second to Eliza, who was truly the apple in James's life, particularly now, after the loss of his wife and two other daughters. James and his secretary made an odd pair, especially as they came from such different backgrounds: the urbane English judge and a man who had been lost in the no-man's landscape of the racial and class-riven environment that was India, where there was no place within society for one who was neither English nor Indian, yet who could aspire to be both.

Fortunately for Vashi, his unknown English parent had provided him with an education normally the preserve of offspring of those expatriates who could not quite afford the expenses of schooling in Mother England, yet still merited academic nourishment to match their status as a member of the white Raj. This type of education was the key to obtaining a position in the country's colonial public service which, like the emerging railways network, was run on the lines of its British counterpart, though much more populated by clerks, accountants, sub-managers, managers, supervisors, regional directors and secretaries.

The quietly spoken, well-educated Vashi had worked diligently, steadily advancing through the ranks of responsibility and remuneration, even though his salary tended to be woefully inadequate for the social position to which he aspired. He reluctantly

accepted that his mixture of genes would always deny him a position near the top of the public sector career ladder.

As the trio stood on the deck of the *Emerald Isle*, waiting for their call to one of the boats now swinging free from the embrace of the davits, Eliza considered what she saw was a wondrous sight. The waters were clear, the tree-covered hills ran down to meet the meandering harbour in folds that created little bays and inlets, especially on the northern side. The stiff breeze carried the unmistakable, unknown scent of the Australian bush. Everything was so different: from the clouds of nattering parrots that seemed to shimmer and change colour as their flocks wheeled and turned in a frenzy of beating wings to a newly emerging Georgian city. It peeped over the wharfside shed-like buildings which spread on either side of the small cove they were about to land in. Eliza squeezed her father's hand, as if to transmit the message of her excitement and adventure.

Vashi had hurried away to the aft deck and barely made it back in time to join James and Eliza as crew members helped them onto the thwarts of their assigned boat. He took his place, then announced to James, 'Your cabin trunks are safely on deck, sir. Had a quick word with the purser and he will ensure they are given priority when unloading commences.' As James nodded acknowledgement, Vashi added, 'It's really a disgrace, cramming us into the ship's boats like so many cattle. You deserve better than that!'

Eliza turned and eyed Vashi in a speculative manner that bore its own message, despite her tender years.

James sought to make light of the situation. 'I suppose it cannot be helped, Vashi. At least we're all in the same boat, eh?'

Vashi was not to be put off. 'As you say, sir. Although one should have imagined it would not have been impossible to sail this vessel the few remaining yards to the wharf.'

Eliza continued to stare at Vashi. Her father's personal assistant ignored her.

On the wharf Elizabeth and Sarah noted the slow process of bringing the passengers ashore.

'You'd better tell Thomas there could be more delay,' Sarah told Elizabeth. 'We don't want the carriage disappearing on us.'

'It was still at the end of the wharf. At least when I last looked,' Elizabeth responded.

'Well, go and be sure it stays that way!'

The tension of the coming encounter with their new master was getting to Sarah. Elizabeth shrugged and made off through the waiting crowd.

There was no mistaking the identities of the tall, dignified English gentleman, his young blonde daughter and the brooding Vashi, who maintained a practised three paces behind his master, as they emerged from one of the *Emerald Isle's* small boats.

The shy Bailey sisters had to steel themselves to introduce themselves. Since they had landed in the colony quite recently too, they felt some empathy with their new charges, setting foot in an alien land. The judge's business representative in Sydney, whose job had been to organise suitable and competent staff, had contacted them. As the eldest of a family of twelve, Elizabeth and Sarah were reasonably confident about their ability to carry out their assigned duties: clean, run errands and take care of the child, Eliza.

Introductions were made and Elizabeth passed on the apology of James's business representative, local solicitor George Bryson, who had taken ill and was unable to be present.

James turned to Eliza. 'This is my daughter, Eliza Emily, and,' indicating his secretary, 'Mr Vashi Larkman.'

The sisters curtsied in unison, though Vashi appeared unimpressed.

'Mr Larkman will be available to take care of matters during my absences from time to time, and you will answer directly to him.'

Vashi wasted no time in reinforcing his status. 'Now where is our

carriage, young ladies?' he demanded, eschewing formalities. 'I trust it is waiting.' He looked up and down the congested wharf and the thoroughfare beyond for a sign of the vehicle.

Sarah began to explain that the carriage was waiting farther down the street when Vashi interrupted. 'There appears to be no sign of it. You did not forget to arrange it?'

'Oh, no, sir,' Sarah blurted. 'The carriage is at the other end of the street where we thought it was best ...'

'The other end of the street?' Vashi cut in, making it sound as though Sarah had said the far side of the moon. He shook his head as if in disbelief.

Elizabeth chimed in to take the pressure off her distressed sister. 'The crowd and activities might frighten the horses, sir.' Before Vashi could respond, she added, 'I will go and fetch the driver.'

Vashi glowered darkly at the girls, though James smiled. 'The driver can help with the baggage,' he said easily. Privately, he thought the young girls looked to have done quite well, considering their delayed landing and its resultant chaos around the wharf.

Once the last of the passengers had been landed, the crew loaded trunks, cases, boxes, packages, caged birds and all manner of paraphernalia which were evidently thought essential in the establishment of a new life, into the clinker-built ship's boats. Until the growing mountain of baggage could be sorted, the Donnithorne party, along with their fellow passengers, would be obliged to make arrangements for most of their belongings to follow later. The purser had kept his word to Vashi, and their cabin trunks had received priority.

Satisfied that things seemed under control, James asked Sarah, 'Tell me ... what is the condition of Camperdown Lodge? Have the renovations been completed?'

'Well, sir,' Sarah began, 'some parts are, but some parts are not.'

James smiled at the response. Nor was the unintended humour lost on Eliza, who grinned broadly.

Vashi did not share their lightheartedness. 'For goodness sake, girl, which parts are, and which parts are not?' Vashi growled. 'The master needs to know!'

It was all becoming too much for Sarah. Her eyes started to moisten, a hint of the likely tears to follow.

The tension was broken by the return of Elizabeth with the carriage driver in tow. She searched Sarah's pale face. 'What's wrong, dear Sarah?' she demanded, looking to Vashi, immediately suspecting him of being the source of her sister's distress.

'If you ask me, I think your dear sister is a touch confused,' Vashi responded. Elizabeth, who could usually deal with any situation under pressure, looked back to Vashi, smiled sweetly and, in a soft voice that had the hint of steel, replied, 'But I didn't ask you, did I?'

James saw things were starting to get out of hand. Despite his even temper, he was in no mood for a public squabble between the hired help, and he was mildly annoyed with Vashi's handling of the situation. 'Please overlook it if we appear to be a little short, young ladies,' he said. 'We have spent many weeks on a damp, and at times unpleasant, voyage. It has been long and tiring, so you must understand how taxed we each feel.' James looked directly at Vashi, who took the hint and fell silent.

The Bailey sisters were calmed, though not completely reassured by their new master's words. Unlike his officious secretary, he seemed a fair and reasonable man. They decided Vashi was the one to watch.

Out of the corner of her eye Sarah caught the ghost of a smile in Eliza's blue eyes. It seemed that the child had inherited her father's disposition as well as his looks.

Once the luggage had been packed into the creaking carriage, the party set off for Camperdown Lodge, a journey of some four miles that took them through the muddy, unpaved streets of Sydney, which teemed with life and stray dogs.

As the pitching carriage reached more open countryside, passing

a scattering of dwellings, including some substantial residences, Eliza was glued to her window, taking in the passing sights.

James turned to Elizabeth. 'Now then. You had better tell me who we are about to meet.'

Elizabeth considered. 'Well, sir, there's Mrs Humphries,' she began. 'She's your housekeeper. Then you have two scullery maids, Rose and Angela.' Elizabeth glanced to the front of the carriage. 'You have already met Thomas, the driver. He is assisted by a stablehand, Max, who helps out with the horses and dogs.'

Sarah joined in, her bruised confidence starting to return. 'There's Gordon and his two hands ...'

Elizabeth nodded, elaborating for James's benefit. 'Gordon is the head gardener.' James listened to the growing list of his inherited help, keeping count. Elizabeth concluded, 'Our cook is Margaret, though Mrs Humphries also gets involved in the kitchen.'

James nodded. 'So that's it then?'

Before Elizabeth could confirm the household list, Sarah piped up, 'And there is the two of us, sir.'

James assumed good-natured surprise. 'Indeed. Thank you for reminding us, Sarah. I was beginning to think we might have been understaffed!'

Eliza turned from the window, cupping a hand over her mouth to conceal her mirth. Elizabeth smiled indulgently at her sister. Vashi sniffed and looked upward, as if seeking divine intervention to rescue him from the two maidservants.



Camperdown Lodge made an impressive sight, a grand mansion worthy of what James Donnithorne had come to accept as his right. He was not only pleased at what he saw and also somewhat relieved because, having been unable to find a suitable house on a former visit

to Sydney, he had purchased it sight unseen on the recommendation of his representative, George Bryson. Bryson had hired a team of carpenters, painters and decorators and some master masons to bring the mansion to a condition suited for both comfortable habitation and a place from where business could be conducted. It also reflected the place James would assume in the local business community, government administration and social circles.

The Lodge had some thirty rooms, all furnished with quality and hand-crafted furniture and fittings, most of which had been imported from Europe, and with possessions acquired over the years of living in India (excluding those sold or disposed of in the sub-continent prior to departure).

The hub of business activities was to be the large study. James had given detailed instructions about how the vast chamber was to be made both comfortable and functional, yet in a manner that reflected good taste and position. Its walls were panelled in mahogany with cedar bookshelves that reached to the vaulted ceilings. An expansive writing desk with the Donnithorne coat of arms carved into the front panels faced the doorway and those who were admitted.

Camperdown Lodge enjoyed a picturesque setting, the estate occupying a rise on Newtown's main street, along which shops and business offices were steadily growing in number and were interspersed with some fine homes. At the lower end of the slope was a small lake surrounded by grassy banks, a clump of mature shade trees and a sheltered gazebo.

The carriage turned from O'Connell Street into King Street, coming to a stop at the main entrance to the Lodge, where the servants had formed a line to greet their new master and the young mistress.

James and Eliza walked slowly along the assembled retainers. James shook hands with the males and nodded acknowledgement to the females, each of whom curtsied. Eliza, too, was the recipient of curtsies and short bows from the men.

With the formalities concluded, the travel-weary trio entered the house, relieved that the journey was at an end. The smells of fresh paint and recently sawn timber created its own homely and welcoming touch as they entered the vast reception chamber.

When Eliza set eyes upon the cedar-and-tiled grand staircase that curved upwards to the mansion's first-floor chambers, she could not restrain her excitement and curiosity. She ran up the tiled steps to investigate the wonders and mysteries that beckoned and which only the young can conjure. At the top she turned, looking back to her father. 'Papa! Come and let's look up here! It all seems so wonderful.' With the impatience of youth, Eliza did not wait for a response and disappeared into the upper regions of her new home, very much the pioneering explorer about to chart the passage for those who came behind.

The grand stairway evoked long slumbering memories for James Donnithorne. Just as his very own Eliza was brimming with enthusiasm and a zest for what was to follow next, he too had been gripped by a special sense of excitement—and apprehension. James was in his late teens when he had mounted an impressive stairway to his first meeting with members of the Royal Family. It was an event that changed the course of his life. Despite being accustomed to moving in circles of wealth and position, James's heart had begun beating harder as the carriage he and his father were in approached the palace.

The pair mounted grand stairs to be presented to the court of King George III. His much-respected father occupied a position of trust and responsibility with the sovereign, advising him on business matters and estate management, and possessing the title of Warden of the Duchy of Cornwall. James's recollection of his first meeting with the king upon whose empire the sun was said to never set was rather blurred, his youthful awe and nervousness blunting the sharpness of the details and what exactly was said.

That first visit to the royal court was to be followed by many

others, at first in the company of his father. It was on one such visit that he had met the Prince Regent, heir to the throne. The young men found they had much in common, enjoyed each other's company and a close relationship began. It was to lead to turmoil in the Court of St James, a potential constitutional crisis, and to James making a new life in the colonies.

To be, in effect, exiled was a bitter pill for James Donnithorne, who was descended from ancient Cornish stock, untitled nobility whose lineage extended back through the centuries and was represented on the dynastic trees of many of England's most illustrious and aristocratic families. His ancestors dated back to William the Conqueror and generations of Donnithornes served kings, queens and princes of England in various capacities, right up to the time of James's father Nicholas.

James was never to call England his home again. The savannahs and jungles of India, the wide sun-baked plains and flinty bush of Australia would take the place of England's green and rolling hills and dales.

The scurrying of Eliza's footfalls on the stairway brought James out of his reverie. It was time to think of the future, and the centrepiece of that would be his precious surviving daughter. Only the best would be good enough for her.

Chapter Four

Life was comfortable at Camperdown Lodge, which was situated in an atmosphere that was similar to that of a peaceful English village. Newtown of the 1830s was in stark contrast to what the Donnithornes had left behind, a far cry from the clamour of overcrowded Indian cities, incessant noise, smells and jostling humanity in all its aspects in the struggle of living and surviving.

The head gardener, Gordon, ensured that the grounds were maintained in a highly manicured condition, with much care bestowed upon the lawns, flowerbeds, box hedges, shrubs, pathways, rockeries and fountains. Within three months of James and Eliza's arrival all the renovations, mostly outdoors, had been completed. One of the last had been the construction of a conservatory, an impressive structure built to James's detailed specifications, and joined to the east wing of the main residence. The ironwork, steel lattice and light-diffusing glass were imported from Scottish foundaries and glassworks. Each piece of the special glass had been duplicated, to allow for the hazards of such long-distance transportation.

The Donnithornes soon settled into their new life but, much to Eliza's chagrin, her father was increasingly absent on business pursuits. He wasted little time in consolidating commercial links and establishing business projects and investments, spread far and wide among developing towns and cities, mostly situated on distant shores on the southeast coast and along the few major rivers.

James had been prompt in restarting Eliza's education. She was enrolled at an exclusive young ladies' college near the city. Each weekday she was driven to and from the school by carriage, arriving home after mid-afternoon classes. It was a secure yet cloistered life and, at times, a lonely existence for a girl who always seemed to be bidding her father farewell, then running into his arms on his return. Even the many, often extravagant, gifts that always accompanied James's return were beginning to pall. Eliza lacked friends of her own age to share interests and the secrets of discovery, so important for young girls. A voyage to England to spend some time living at Twickenham with her elder brother Edward and his wife Elizabeth relieved a little of her boredom.

Back in Sydney, there was always the hovering presence of Vashi, who made no secret of his disapproval of anything that approached crossing the boundaries in a mistress-and-servant relationship. The housekeeper Mrs Humphries, a sympathetic and maternal figure, was unable to do much for Eliza either, with her demanding workload and being continually under pressure from Vashi, who lost no opportunity to undermine her authority. The kindly, attentive Bailey sisters did what they could to make Eliza's situation more tolerable, but they were constrained by their place in the household. However, their mutual though unspoken dislike of Vashi provided a bond for Eliza and her two sister maidservants and each shared a feeling of relief when he accompanied James on some of his travels. From the young mistress Eliza, to the upstairs and downstairs maids, the housekeeper, cook, gardeners, outdoors staff, the entire household felt that an omnipresent yoke had been temporarily lifted from their lives with the absence of the stiff, starched, autocratic Vashi.

One day when her father was absent in town on some business mission, Eliza resolved to fulfil a long-held ambition, something James had vetoed. Vashi was in his tiny office under the rear stairs dealing with a mountain of paperwork. Max the young stablehand

was helping Thomas saddle up the work cart, about to leave to pick up some provisions. Eliza decided the time was as good as any to put her plan into action.

Max bent down to give a girdle strap a final tighten, then stepped back to give the horse a pat on its flanks. 'There you are, Harriet. That should do you, girl,' he told the old grey mare.

Thomas nodded approval of Max's efforts, hauled himself up onto the driver's bench. 'I'll be back in about three hours. You can start grooming the horses while I'm gone.'

Max stepped clear and watched the cart rattle its way to the gates. Eliza stood aside as the cart lurched past and received an impromptu salute as Thomas raised his whip to acknowledge her presence. The cart passed from sight and Eliza turned back to the stables.

Max had disappeared within the building.

It was time to make her move.

She found him in an open stall, preparing to groom a striking-looking black horse, a new acquisition. Eliza stood in the twilight of the stables with its smells of chaff, straw, leather and the unmistakable, though not unpleasant, aroma of horse flesh, watching Max fuss about the handsome animal.

The stablehand became aware of her presence. 'Oh, it's you, Miss Eliza!'

Eliza smiled. 'She's a beautiful horse, Max.'

Max crooked his head, adopted a knowing look. 'Well, not exactly a she, Miss ...' Eliza considered for a moment. 'Hm. A he then, eh?'

Max laid aside the grooming brush, still surprised by the arrival of the young mistress. 'Well, let me put it this way, Miss Eliza. George here is not the man he used to be.'

It was Eliza's turn for a knowing look. 'So ... George is a gelding?'

Max was impressed. 'So you know about horses?'

'We had horses in India. Father and his friends played polo. And at times the family would ride.'

Max was even more impressed by the news. 'You can ride then?'

Eliza assumed a wistful demeanour and shook her head. 'Father always said I was too young. He was right, I suppose.'

Max nodded in sympathetic understanding 'But ... I always wanted to ride,' Eliza added in a soft, disappointed voice. She beamed and hunched up her shoulders in a symbol of unhappy acceptance. Not yet fourteen, she was worldly beyond her years, as the stablehand was discovering.

Max was no match for the lovely young girl with her golden hair and startlingly blue eyes. He took the bait. 'Well, I reckon you're not too young now, Miss ...'

Eliza feigned surprise, still holding Max in an unblinking gaze. 'Why, yes. You could be right, Max!'

Ten minutes later Eliza was perched on George's saddle, with Max holding the reins. He was jogging along the churned exercise yard, and the black gelding trotted to keep up. Eliza squealed in delight.

Max yelled encouragement. 'You're doing real good, Miss!'

Max's face was beaded in perspiration as he continued to lead George around the exercise track. A household hound attracted by the action decided to join in and scampered along beside the horse. A few minutes later Max slowed to a halt, now out of breath. The dog continued to yelp and jump about, as if encouraging him to continue.

Eliza was bright-eyed with excitement. She reached down to Max, announcing, 'I think I have the hang of it! Let me have the reins now, Max. You look exhausted!'

Max could barely find his voice. He shook his head and managed, 'Er, don't know about that, Miss ...'

Eliza pouted what she hoped was a conspiratorial smile. 'Oh, Max. Please. Pretty please!' She reached out to accept the reins. Max was still hesitant. Eliza added, 'I'll simply trot George around the track ... I promise ...'

She reached down for the reins again.

Max agonised. Eliza fixed him in a beaming smile, her blue eyes working overtime. It was all becoming too much for the stablehand. After all, Eliza was the mistress of the household.

He heaved a sigh and passed up the reins. 'Take it slow now ...'

Eliza took the reins. 'Thank you, Max. I shall be all right. Cross my heart.' Eliza trotted George around the yard at a sedate pace and the hound again joined in the fun, yelping and leaping in delight. Max leaned against the wooden railings and tracked Eliza's solo effort. He felt more at ease now.

Her confidence growing, Eliza gave the reins two firm shakes to crank up the pace. George responded obediently and began to canter. The yelping hound bounded along close to the horse's blurring legs, as though he, too, was sharing Eliza's excitement.

Max was jolted from his calm, alerted by the thudding tempo of pounding hooves. In growing alarm he saw that Eliza had the black gelding nearly at a full gallop. Out on the track the racing hound drew ahead of George, as if accepting the challenge of a race. A few moments later and without warning, the dog veered across George's path. With a frantic whinny of alarm, the horse reared up to avoid trampling the hound.

Eliza was thrown off balance and slid from the saddle with a scream, one foot jammed in the stirrup as she fell. She was dragged along the ground on her back, inches from the threshing hooves.

Max was galvanised into action. He ran onto the track to intercept George. As he grabbed at the horse's flailing reins, Eliza's trapped ankle became free of the stirrup and she slewed to a bumping stop in the churned dirt. Max dropped to his knees beside Eliza, who lay motionless, eyes closed, her face caked with dirt and bearing abrasions.

Max looked about in panic. 'Help! Somebody help here!' he shouted. He looked back to Eliza and noticed blood smeared in her hair. 'Oh dear god,' he sobbed. 'Miss Eliza, Miss ... say something!'

The hound sidled beside him and licked at his wrist.



Dr Malcolm Sedgewick placed his black leather medical bag on a chair near the bed then turned back to his latest patient. Eliza's face had been cleaned up, though it still bore a few abrasions, some swelling to one side of the face, and her head was lightly bandaged. From a pale face, her eyes were open beneath heavy lids.

The doctor smiled down at her. 'You had a nasty tumble, but you're going to be alright. A week of rest for that ankle then you should be up and about.'

Eliza digested his prognosis, running the tip of her tongue over her parched lips. Her eyes opened wider. 'You mean I shall be here for a week? Just ... lying here?'

Dr Sedgewick sought to rationalise her situation. 'Your ankle is strained, bruised and swollen, so we should give it a chance to settle down. Besides, a week passes quickly and we can remove your head bandage in about three days. It was just a minor cut.'

Eliza turned her face into the pillow, not pleased by the news.

The doctor made one more try. 'Tell you what, Eliza. I have a daughter Vicky. She's about your age. We moved into the place on the corner a few months ago—you might have seen her about ...?'

Eliza was disinterested, had other things on her mind. 'I don't believe I have ...' she breathed.

Sedgewick decided the young lady was not going to be an easy patient. He soldiered on. 'No matter. Vicky has seen you, in the garden. And I happen to know she would like to meet you.'

Eliza remained silent, noncommittal.

'How about I get Vicky to come and visit? I'm sure you would have many things to talk about.'

Eliza remained more concerned about a week stuck in bed than visits by strangers. But the doctor seemed a nice enough man and she did not wish to appear unappreciative.

After a long silence, she pulled her face from the pillow, looked up and nodded briefly.

Dr Sedgewick beamed. 'Excellent. Vicky will be delighted!'

James waited in the main entrance for the doctor. 'Your daughter had a lucky escape,' he announced reassuringly. 'Had she been clipped by the animal's hooves ... well, it might have been a different story. As it is, no serious injury has been done.'

James was relieved. 'I am very grateful you could come so promptly.'

Dr Sedgewick smiled a shrug. 'I'm just around the corner. After all, what are neighbours for, Mr Donnithorne—or should that be "Your Honour"?''

'I no longer sit on the bench these days,' said James, a touch rueful. 'And it's "James".'

'I thought, once a judge, always a judge, ... James?'

The men shook hands.

'And it's "Malcolm". I'll drop by tomorrow to check on our patient. A week in bed off that ankle ought to do the trick. It's badly strained and quite swollen.'

James received the news with good-natured scepticism. 'A week? Now that might take some doing.'

Sedgewick's suspicions had been confirmed. 'I rather gathered that might be the case. With that in mind, I took the liberty of suggesting that my daughter Vicky might call on her. They're about the same age.'

James liked the suggestion. 'Sounds like a splendid idea.'

As the doctor was about to take his leave, he paused. 'I'm told that you are an old India hand, James.'

James nodded. 'Word does get around. Spent more than half my life on the sub-continent. Mostly Bengal. What about you, Malcolm?'

The doctor broke into a broad grin. 'Would you believe ... fifteen years based in Delhi?'

'Well, I'm blessed! Small world, eh?' James responded, as they again shook hands.

James was still smiling to himself at the prospect of a new friend and neighbour with whom he had much in common when Vashi appeared as if from the woodwork—it was a trait of his secretary which most found unnerving.

'May I have a word, sir?' he asked.

James stopped and motioned Vashi to elaborate. 'It's dreadful about Miss Eliza,' he began. 'The household is most upset.'

'I appreciate everyone's concern, though it could have been much worse. The doctor says she will be back on her feet in a week.'

'Oh, er, that is good news, sir.'

James crooked his head. 'I'm inclined to agree with you there, Vashi. Now was there anything else?' He sensed Vashi had something on his mind.

'May I suggest, sir,' Vashi began, 'that what remains now is punishment of the party responsible.'

James was unimpressed. 'Hmm. I gather that the party responsible—as you put it—was in fact a dog.'

Vashi was not to be put off. 'With respect, Miss Eliza should not have been permitted to get on that horse.'

James sighed, anxious to get back to his office. 'Eliza has been pestering me to let her ride for ages. I suspect she talked the stablehand into it. Once that girl makes up her mind ...'

Vashi was like a dog with a bone. 'The stablehand, Max, was in charge of the animal. He was the one who let Miss Eliza ride.'

James was starting to find the conversation pointless, a molehill being portrayed as a mountain. 'What are you suggesting, Vashi? That we flog Max at the stake? Or boil him in oil?'

Vashi gave a nervous smile, sensing his master's growing impatience. 'It is simply an issue of discipline and good order,' he persevered. 'It's what the household would wish to see.'

James was a touch incredulous. 'Are you telling me that the servants want to see the young man punished in some manner?'

Vashi pushed on. 'The staff expect that good order ought to be demonstrated. Perceptions can be important, sir.'

For James, the issue had become as tiresome as it was trivial. There were times when Vashi was pedantic to the point where he could cheerfully throttle him. 'Well, if the rest of the household want a display of, er, chastisement—though why I cannot imagine—you may take the matter up with them.'

Vashi could barely veil his delight. 'You may depend upon me, sir.'

As James turned away to return to his office, a nagging doubt took hold. Perhaps it might be a good idea to place Vashi on a leash. 'I expect you to handle the matter responsibly and with understanding. We merely seek a reprimand. Not a hanging. Is that understood?'

Vashi smiled reassuringly. 'Exactly what I had in mind, sir.'



Two days had elapsed since Eliza's mishap. She remained in bed, propped on pillows and listlessly scanning a book that had clearly failed to hold her interest. She loved most books. Today, though, nothing in print could prevent her bed chamber from growing smaller and more confining as the hours dragged by. She was about to give up, lay the book aside, when there was a polite rap on the door.

'Yes. Who is it?' she called.

Sarah poked her head in the door. 'Visitor for you, Miss Eliza.'

Before Eliza could respond, a teenage girl, with golden auburn hair, bright green eyes and a scatter of not unattractive freckles on her friendly face, pushed past Sarah, holding a large bunch of flowers.

Vicky Sedgewick strolled confidently over to Eliza's bed, ignoring a nervous Sarah. With an impish smile she announced, 'I believe you have met my father.'

For a few moments Eliza remained nonplussed.

'I'm Vicky,' the newcomer prompted. 'Vicky Sedgewick.'

The penny dropped. 'Oh, yes. I happen to be confined here on your father's orders.' Eliza looked at Sarah, who had remained in the open doorway, unsure of how to react to the visitor's invasion of her mistress's privacy. 'Thank you. That will be all, Sarah.'

Vicky placed the flowers on the bedside table, then extended both hands for Eliza to grasp. 'Daddy means well. It's just that he's concerned about your leg.'

Eliza accepted the double hand clasp, nodded to the bulging bedcovers near the end of the bed. 'It's my ankle.'

Vicky inclined her head. 'Well, I was rather close.' Without further ceremony she perched herself on the side of the bed. 'I understand you're quite a horsewoman,' she said with a knowing smile.

Despite her inbred reserve when first meeting people, Eliza was ensnared by her visitor's breezy, outgoing manner. 'Well, I was going quite well—for the first five minutes!'

Vicky reached over to retrieve the flowers and held them up to Eliza for inspection. 'I always seem to associate these with weddings and funerals. Though I must say you don't look like a candidate for either.'

Eliza feigned surprised shock. 'Especially the second category!' They broke into laughter. As Eliza went to raise herself on the bed, her laughter lapsed into a sharp cry of pain. 'Oh ... my ankle!'

Vicky picked up the flowers and pretended to take aim at Eliza. 'Want me to put you out of your misery?'

In spite of her pain, Eliza started to laugh again, setting her body shaking and producing another burst of pain. Vicky pulled a face and joined in the laughter. The high-spirited visitor would play a role in Eliza's life that would extend beyond even a close friendship. It would also result in happiness, romance and heartbreak.



Max sat on an overturned box in the quiet half-light of the stables, head lowered, as though studying his boots, searching for the right words. He finally looked up. 'So ... you reckon that'd be the right thing to do? I mean, I've been happy here. I love the horses.'

Vashi stood aloof and impassive. 'Yes, I do. The master would appreciate it,' he said in a low and deliberate voice. 'It would be the best way to resolve what has been a most unfortunate episode.'

Max was lost and confused by the turn of events. 'But I didn't mean any harm. It were an accident.'

Vashi was relentless. 'The master is most upset. Miss Eliza might have been killed. Can't you see that?'

Max looked down to his boots again and slowly shook his head, struggling to comprehend how this had happened.

Vashi twisted the knife. 'You let her ride the horse. You were in charge. You were responsible.'

Max raised his head. 'So ... I should leave?'

Vashi snapped a curt nod of affirmation. 'Write a short note of apology. Inform the master you accept full responsibility for what occurred. And under the circumstances you believe it would be best that you go.'

Vashi paused for the message to sink in, before adding, 'It would be the most honourable way to bring the matter to an end.'

Max looked embarrassed. 'But ... but I never learned to write.'

Vashi exhaled, beginning to lose patience, though he maintained the low and deliberate voice. 'I am prepared to write the note for you. You must understand that I am here to help you.'

Max remained uncertain.

Vashi added, 'Or, if you prefer, I shall inform the master of your decision. That you are sorry. Accept the blame. And will leave Camperdown Lodge.'

Max muttered to himself, 'I didn't mean to hurt Miss Eliza. It was the dog that spooked George. And the dog was only playing.'

Vashi was unmoved. 'Yes. The dog. It will need to be dealt with.'

Max did not like the message in Vashi's voice, searched his face. 'The dog meant no harm He's a good dog.'

Vashi was exasperated. 'The dog is clearly dangerous. It will be shot.'

Max was incredulous. 'You going to shoot the dog?'

Vashi brushed Max's concern aside. 'It would be best if you left now—without further delay.'



James, hands clasped behind his back, stared from the study window which provided a view of his precious conservatory. A minute ticked away by the wall clock behind his desk before James turned from the view and faced Vashi. 'I did not imagine the young man would take it so hard,' he said in a quiet voice.

Vashi assumed a weary smile. 'Well, sir, it was, after all, his decision. He wanted to write a note expressing his regret. However, the stablehand is an illiterate so that was out of the question.'

James remained silent, so Vashi elaborated. 'He wanted me to personally pass on to you how he felt.'

James gave a nod. 'Well, I suppose that's it then. Pity. I gathered he loved his work with the horses.'

Vashi sensed his master's guard had been momentarily lowered. He decided to adopt a helpful, businesslike approach. 'Of course, I shall undertake to find a suitable replacement. Thomas will need such assistance.'

'Yes, thank you, Vashi,' was James's absent response.

Vashi pushed on. 'And I shall attend to any loose ends that might be related to the recent events.'

James wanted to be left alone, to get back to his work. 'Thank you Vashi, I appreciate your assistance in this unfortunate matter.'

For some minutes after Vashi left, James continued looking at the conservatory. He came to the conclusion that even though his secretary could be quite irritating and needed to be reined in at times, nevertheless he always seemed ready to volunteer to sort out any problems. Yes, on balance, James decided that he was indeed fortunate to have such a loyal righthand man. He turned away from the window, back to his paper-littered desk.



Margaret paused at the door of the downstairs service entry, her arms full of garden greens, turnips and carrots. She nudged the door open with her shoulder and edged inside. She just made it to the kitchen before her load began to come adrift and heaped the vegetables onto a side table. Released of her burden, Margaret shook her hands and wiggled her fingers, regaining circulation. She glanced about her domain, muttering to herself, 'What have these girls done with my basket?' Then her eyes widened with surprise.

Vashi was in the adjoining servants' station. He was reaching up, grabbing at the rows of small hooks set along a wall, where the keys bearing identification tags, most relating to room and cabinet numbers, were hung.

Curious, Margaret crossed to the arch that separated the station from the kitchen. 'Is there something I can fetch you, Mr Vashi?'

Without turning from his task, Vashi told the wall, 'Yes. I need the key to the firearms cabinet.'

Margaret entered the room, obliged to reply to Vashi's back. 'That key cannot be given out, sir. At least, not without the master's permission in writing.'

Vashi swung around to face Margaret. 'You had better keep in mind who you are speaking to!' he snapped. 'I need that key. And I want it now!'

Margaret was taken aback, by both the nature of the request and Vashi's reaction to her reply. 'I ... I'm not sure I can oblige you, Mr Vashi,' she stammered.



Down in the stables, Max was ready to take to the road. He toted a bulky canvas bag slung over one shoulder by a leather strap. Some small leather pouches dangled from his belt, containing the balance of his worldly possessions. He wore a leather hat and jacket, and high-rise boots.

Max walked slowly along the line of stalls, saying farewell to his four-legged friends. He reached in and stroked the horses, talking softly to them; they seemed to listen, extending muzzles with ears folded back. In one stall there was a pony which whinnied a welcome and seemed very pleased to see him. Max reached into a pocket and produced an apple, which the young animal eagerly accepted as he held it extended in one hand. 'There you are, young fella,' Max whispered. 'Fraid you'll have to find a new friend for your daily treat.' In the last stall Max placed an arm around the neck of George, the black gelding. 'It wasn't your fault,' he told the horse, which lowered its head and snorted softly. 'You've got a good heart, wouldn't hurt a fly,' he added, giving George a final stroke.

Max turned away and saw that Thomas had been watching quietly. He seemed affected by what he was witnessing. Gathering himself, he asked, 'Sure you know what you're doing, lad?'

Max sniffed and blinked to stifle any evidence of tears. 'Yeah. Think it's best.' Since there seemed little more to say, Max and Thomas stood silently, uncomfortable in the spell of unaccustomed emotion which each felt.

Thomas indicated the stalls and managed to say, 'We're all going to miss you, boy.'

Max nodded. 'Yeah. Thanks for everything, Thomas.'

The men shook hands. Max hitched the tote bag higher on his shoulder. Thomas watched bleakly after Max, who was briefly silhouetted in the afternoon glare at the doorway. Then he was gone.



In the servants' station, Vashi was now in a fit of fury born of frustration. Below the vacant hooks, a collection of keys littered the flagging. For a few moments he glared at the wall, as if willing it to speak. Vashi turned to address Margaret. 'Enough of this! Tell me, woman.' Vashi stopped short. The cook had left. Now alone in the room, he completed the sentence for his own resolve. 'Just where is that key?'

Angela appeared from the kitchen, surprised by Vashi's presence in the servants' station and the keys strewn on the stone floor. 'Oh, it's Mr Vashi!' she exclaimed.

Vashi glared at the scullery maid. Of course it's "Mr Vashi", you stupid ...' He stopped in mid-sentence as it occurred to him that the girl might prove useful after all. Mustering a smile, he enquired, 'It's, er, Rose, isn't it?'

Angela shook her head. 'It's Angela, sir.'

'Of course, Angela. And you're just the one who can help me.'

Angela was uncertain. 'Help you, sir?'

Vashi threw a sidelong glance at the keys on the floor. 'Just cannot seem to put my hands on the right key.'

Angela was still none the wiser. 'Which key might that be, sir?'

Vashi shrugged ruefully, 'Oh, the one for the firearms cabinet. Bit of a nuisance, really. You must know where it is.'

Angela was unsure. 'I'm not supposed to know that, Mr Vashi.'

Vashi knew he had struck pay dirt. He produced a knowing smile. 'Yes, I understand. But you do know. Don't you, Angela?'

The young maid was a rabbit caught in a hunter's gunsight. She started to shake her head. Vashi approached and placed both hands firmly on her shoulders and locked her into a cold stare. 'Now, there's a good girl,' he spoke softly.



The key clicked reassuringly in the lock of the wood-panelled cabinet. Vashi drew back both doors and took in the orderly rows of weaponry: rifles, shotguns, holstered pistols, two cavalry swords and a number of hunting knives in their allotted spaces on the racks. On a lower shelf were boxes of ammunition, protected in pigfat-greased wrapping.

Vashi reached in and selected a shotgun. 'Now this is more like it,' he told himself as he inspected the weapon. Then he shrugged, leaned into the cabinet and replaced the shotgun in its place on the rack.



Mrs Humphries sank onto a chaise longue in the sitting room, shaking her head in disbelief. 'You what ... ? Why on earth would you do such a thing?' she demanded.

Angela was on the verge of tears. 'I know it was wrong, Mrs H. But he made me tell.'

The housekeeper exhaled a deep breath of exasperation, pursed her lips. 'And what was it,' she began, 'he said about the dog?'

'Something about punishment,' Angela quavered. 'For hurting Miss Eliza, I think.' Mrs Humphries glanced helplessly about the room, as though the wallpaper or the furniture might provide an answer to her dilemma.

Angela stood and agonised as guilt threatened to overwhelm her. She felt she had to say something. 'Should we tell the master?' she ventured nervously.

Mrs Humphries shook her head. 'He's out. Not sure when he'll be back. But we must try and do something.' She looked about the room again, then back to the distraught scullery maid. 'There's only one person we can tell.'

At the far end of the Lodge, in his tiny office under the back stairs, Vashi fondled a Winchester rifle. He pulled back the bolt and slipped a bullet into the firing chamber, raising the weapon to take aim at a hat hanging from a wall peg. 'Bang! bang,' he murmured, squinting down the sights. He slowly lowered the rifle. True, it was not as forgiving as the wide scatter of a shotgun, but much less messy, he told himself.

Vashi ejected the bullet and placed it aside with five other shells on his desk. He consulted his pocket watch. Now seemed as good a time as any.



Eliza raised herself from the pillows. 'He must intend to shoot the poor animal,' she exclaimed.

Having delivered the news, Mrs Humphries and the distressed Angela stood silently by the bed awaiting their young mistress's reaction, and perhaps advice.

Eliza considered for a few moments. Then she leaned forward and pulled aside the bedcovers, stifling a stab of pain from her ankle. 'Here. Help me,' she asked, reaching out to the housekeeper.

'You're not getting up?' Mrs Humphries was taken aback.

Eliza waved her arms impatiently. 'Just give me your hand.'

Mrs Humphries went to shake her head, adding, 'But your ankle, Miss . . . the doctor said ...'

'Fiddlesticks! Just help me out of bed,' Eliza snapped, in growing impatience.

Mrs Humphries and Angela exchanged fearful glances. Their

mutual trepidation was resolved by Eliza. 'I shan't ask you again. Now, give me your hand!' Eliza's voice had an authoritative tone that neither had heard before.



With the Winchester resting over his shoulder, Vashi approached the stables, feeling confident in the knowledge the master would be absent for the day and Eliza was confined to her room. He had, after all, been granted permission to tidy up any loose ends arising from the recent events, so his conscience was clear. It could be argued that he was simply carrying out the master's wishes. He strode forward with purpose—in his own mind, an enforcer of justice.



Eliza struggled to navigate the curving staircase, an arm draped around Mrs Humphries' shoulder, hopping on one foot, taking one step at a time. Angela trailed behind, looking lost and feeling helpless at the trouble she had caused. Progress was painfully slow. Eliza tried to ignore the stabbing pain from her protesting ankle, often coming to a brief stop. There were times when Mrs Humphries was tempted to suggest a return to bed, though Eliza's determination would put flight to any such advice.



Vashi reached the entrance to the stables. He stopped and looked around. There was nobody in sight. 'Thomas! You there?' he called.

For a while there was no response. He was about to call again when Thomas appeared from the stalls. He eyed the rifle pointing skywards from Vashi's shoulder. 'What's with that?' he asked in surprise.

Vashi ignored Thomas's curiosity. Dispensing with ceremony he ordered, 'Where is that dog?'

Thomas heaved a weary sigh, 'Eh? What dog? We have four of them. Or, er, is it five?'

Vashi slipped the rifle from his shoulder and held it at waist level. 'Just get that dog. Now!' he ordered. There was menace in his voice.



The trio had reached the kitchen, moving slowly to the service entry. With the stairway now behind them, Angela had joined Mrs Humphries in supporting Eliza.

A startled Margaret looked up from slicing some meat cuts. 'Miss Eliza! What's going on?'

As they went through the service entry, the housekeeper muttered, 'Don't ask.' They had not gone much farther when the slightly built Angela began to falter. 'Sorry. I need a bit of a rest,' she gasped.



Thomas stood his ground and made no attempt to produce the hound for Vashi. 'If the dog was to blame, why did Max have to go?' he asked.

Vashi's growing anger was further inflamed by the carriageman's impertinence. 'So ... we have a bush lawyer here?'

With a movement of the rifle, Vashi instructed Thomas to fetch the dog. Thomas remained still and awaited for an answer to his question.

'I'll make it simple for you,' Vashi began, 'so it ought to be easier for you to understand.' The sarcasm was either lost or ignored by Thomas. 'The responsible party in the unfortunate event was the stablehand. The dog was, in fact, an accessory ... after the fact.'

Thomas was none the wiser. 'Eh? After the what?'

Vashi reached the end of his rope. He had had enough of Thomas's obstinancy and stalling tactics. 'For the last time, fetch the dog. Now!'

Thomas looked about, a touch theatrically. 'I'll have a look around ...' he began. As if on cue, the hound appeared from within the stables, wagging its tail at the sight of Thomas.

Vashi smiled. 'Hmm. Now that dog looks rather familiar.'

Thomas was about to speak and deny the dog was the culprit, but he realised the game was up.

Vashi lowered the rifle. 'Let's stop wasting time. Now go and fetch a rope so we can get this done!'

Thomas raised a bushy eyebrow. 'A rope?'

Vashi shook his head in exasperation. 'To tie the creature up. Do you imagine we're going to hang it?'

The hound sat forlorn as Thomas tethered him to a fence post in the exercise yard. The hound licked his hand as he tightened the knot.

Vashi indicated with the Winchester for Thomas to step aside. 'We haven't got all day,' he hissed.

Thomas looked down at the dog, in no hurry to step away. The sound of Vashi sliding the bolt into place ended his stand.

Vashi raised the rifle and peered down the barrel, aligning the sights. His finger tightened on the trigger.



Eliza could now see what was happening in the exercise yard. She screamed out, 'Stop! Don't do it!'

Vashi paused for a moment.

'You heard! It's Miss Eliza,' cried Thomas.

Without taking his eyes from the Winchester's sights, Vashi replied, 'I don't hear anyone.' The trigger finger again tightened.

As Vashi pulled the trigger, Thomas grabbed the barrel, pushing it skywards. The up-tilted rifle and the impact of its recoil made Vashi

lose balance, and he toppled backwards into the dirt. The crack of the rifle was like a burst of thunder that seemed to roll on in the eardrums of those present.

Thomas stood over Vashi, holding the rifle, as Eliza and her helpers tottered into the exercise yard. She looked anxiously at the dog, which crouched on the ground by the post, softly whimpering.

Thomas read her anxiety. 'Dog's all right, Miss. Just scared by all the noise.'

Vashi struggled to his feet, dusting dirt from his jacket. 'You ... you will pay for this,' he told Thomas. He reached out for the weapon. 'Now, no more games. Hand it over!'

Before Thomas could react to the demand, Eliza intervened. 'No, Thomas. You keep it!'

Vashi continued to hold out his hands for the Winchester. 'I demand you hand it over to my custody!'

Thomas faltered at the formality of the request. After all, this was the master's personal assistant. He glanced back to Eliza, who shook her head. 'You heard the mistress,' he breathed, apprehensive about what he was doing.

Alerted by the crack of the rifle, Gordon and his two groundsmen arrived on the scene, bewildered and curious.

Eliza leaned against a fence post to take the strain from her ankle. 'Get one of your people to untie the dog,' she said to Gordon.

She turned back to Mrs Humphries and Angela. 'It's time I went back to bed.'

His face contorted in fury, Vashi stomped off to the residence. He vowed he would never forget nor forgive the humiliation of the day. Revenge would be his.

It had been a defining moment for Eliza. In the absence of her father, she had established her own authority. The awed expressions of the servants told it all. Despite her years, that day she had become someone to be reckoned with.

Chapter Five

Eliza's mishap had its bright side, bonding the households of Camperdown Lodge and Mont Eagle House, a grand pile that was home to Dr Malcolm Sedgewick and his high-spirited daughter Vicky. The Sedgewick property bounded the Donnithorne mansion and extended to King Street.

The close friendship that had grown between Eliza and Vicky was not the only link. Malcolm Sedgewick and James shared a great deal in common. The two men would frequently settle into James's comfortable study, pulling on their pipes, sipping brandy and reminiscing about India, good times, adventures and more prosaic matters about their new lives in New South Wales. Then Eliza and Vicky would escape to Eliza's bedroom, where they would talk endlessly on seemingly innocuous issues, topics that assumed much importance in the world of young ladies whose future appeared to be just beyond the security of the front gates.

The centrepiece of Eliza's chamber was a large Elizabethan dolls' house, which contained and was flanked by an impressive collection of porcelain dolls. The dolls' house was especially important to Eliza since it had belonged to her mother, as had the polished dressing table, matching chairs and other feminine accessories that gave the room its character. Eliza could still recall her mother's beautiful face and soft voice. Her possessions offered memories of past days—of warmth, love and security, which Eliza knew were lost forever. She

could confide her feelings of loss and wistfulness only to Vicky, who would cast aside her impish playfulness, contain her bubbling energy, to listen quietly to the innermost emotions of the girl who had become her closest friend in the whole wide world.

As if by stealth, the months merged into years and Eliza's life settled into a pattern: the continued absences of her father, who was deeply involved in acquiring and operating country estates. Some were reasonably close to home, including the Rodham Farm region which occupied much of the southern foreshore of Port Jackson—what was later to become known as Watson's Bay. There were intervals that James would spend at home, when Eliza enjoyed his care, companionship and fatherly guidance, periods that she cherished. Yet there was always another departure on the horizon, and that made her friendship with Vicky even more important.

When Vicky spent time at Camperdown Lodge, the pair would retreat to their 'special places'. One favourite haunt was a gazebo in the lower slopes of the gardens, a sheltered place set beside a fountain, out of sight of the house, where they felt free of worldly cares. They whiled away the hours there, talking, whispering, laughing, sharing secrets, in a friendship, which like themselves, seemed immortal and without end.

Eliza was now in her twentieth year and was becoming increasingly restless. Besides being restricted to the confines of her home, her only friends of her own age were those approved by her father, always allegedly in her own interests. Invariably they would be from families of government, business leaders, members of the clergy and those of social and fiscal status. In Eliza's eyes, they rarely shared her interests, had little in common with her or were just plain boring. And because their visits were arranged by her father, any chances of successful friendships were soured.

And as far as eligible young men were concerned, James was determined that only those of suitable station, substance, social

background and prospects would be appropriate for his sole surviving daughter. It was all for her own good, he thought, ignoring the fact that those candidates most likely to meet his criteria lived in England.

Vicky, ever optimistic, would try to console Eliza. 'Don't worry, dearest friend, the time will surely come when you will make your own decisions.' Eliza looked unconvinced. Vicky soldiered on. 'Perhaps it's time you told your father just how you feel. Explain that you do not wish to go against him ... it's just that there are things you ought to be allowed to decide for yourself.'

Eliza shook her head and smiled bleakly. 'If only that were possible, dear Vicky.'



The meeting between James and Vashi was drawing to a close, with the secretary careful to disguise his elation at the outcome.

'That's it, then,' James told him. 'From here on we shall expand your involvement. Besides existing book work, you will be responsible for supervising receipt of income, payment of salaries and operating expenses, general liabilities and statutory requirements. Clear?'

Despite himself, Vashi puffed up, delighted with the prospect of more power and influence, both at home and throughout the master's expanding property and investment empire. 'You may depend upon me, sir,' he beamed.

James took off his glasses and put them aside. 'Firstly, we shall need to pay a visit to St Agnes Station. Assess its management and look at the operation in detail.' James was referring to a recent prized acquisition, a quality rural property of several hundred acres which included a sprawling house and impressive outbuildings, more than four hundred miles to the southwest.

Vashi adopted a businesslike demeanor, in keeping with his promotion. 'When do you wish to depart for St Agnes, sir?'

James considered, scanning the open diary on his desk. 'Hmm. Before the weekend. If we book passage on Friday's packet, it ought to have us at Port Philip by the start of next week.' James closed the diary, replaced his glasses, preparatory to moving on to other matters. 'Once at Batmania, we'll go by coach towards the Bendigo goldfields.' Batmania was a city in the south, later known as Melbourne. He consulted his watch. 'Mrs Humphries should be waiting. As you leave, ask her to step in.'

Vashi did not like what he heard. Just what might the housekeeper be up to?

'Perhaps I should remain, sir? Be of some assistance?'

James shook his head. 'You have enough to keep you occupied,' he said dismissively.

Mrs Humphries and Vashi locked eyes in mutual hostility. Vashi indicated by a curt nod of his head for her to enter.

Once the study door was closed, he glanced around, and satisfied the coast was clear, pressed an ear to the door. What Mrs Humphries had to say only took a few minutes. James leaned back in his leather chair and digested what he'd been told. 'Are you sure there is nothing we can do? Are you dissatisfied with the conditions?'

Mrs Humphries shook her head. 'No, sir. It's personal. I need to leave Camperdown Lodge. I make the decision with much regret.'

James shrugged, clearly disappointed. 'Well, I am sorry to lose you, Mrs Humphries. You will be missed.'

Mrs Humphries struggled to control her composure, aware that her eyes were becoming moist.

James heaved a sigh as though in sympathy. 'Perhaps,' he began, 'there is something you might do for me?'

'I, er, should be pleased to do what I can, sir,' the housekeeper stammered uncertainly.

James smiled. 'Splendid! I'm about to go away for three weeks. You won't be easy to replace ... so, would you stay until I get back?'

‘Of course, sir, until my successor is appointed.’

‘I am most grateful,’ James said. ‘Besides your due salary, there will also be an ex gratia payment. To assist in your new endeavours, whatever they might be.’

‘You are kind, sir,’ Mrs Humphries managed in a quavering voice.



Margaret was in the midst of preparing lunch and looked up from the stove as Mrs Humphries entered the kitchen. ‘Well,’ she asked, ‘did you tell him?’

The housekeeper lowered herself onto a chair, wearing a tired expression. ‘The master was most kind. And understanding ...’

Margaret was not satisfied she had received an appropriate answer. ‘I mean, did you make it clear to the master why you wish to leave?’

Mrs Humphries shook her head. ‘That would not have served any good purpose,’ she said quietly.

Margaret could scarcely believe her ears, dropping her ladle back into a large pot of bubbling soup. ‘What! You didn’t say just how impossible that man has made things for you,’ she exclaimed.

Mrs Humphries tried to muster a smile. ‘We both know that Mr Vashi seems to hold some influence with the master. He can never do anything wrong.’

Margaret flopped onto a chair beside the housekeeper. ‘That may be true, although I’m blessed if I know why. But his interference with the running of the house, changing routines at short order, countermanding existing arrangements, could have been brought to the master’s attention.’

‘Perhaps,’ Mrs Humphries acknowledged, ‘though I don’t want to leave in controversy.’

Margaret was going to go on but one look at the subdued housekeeper stopped her. ‘Well,’ she said, ‘you will be sorely missed.’

The cook surveyed the kitchen. 'All this will not be the same without you.'



From the moment Vicky bounced into the bedroom, trying not to look too pleased with herself, Eliza knew her friend was up to something. She was also sure that Vicky would not keep her in the dark for long. And within minutes Vicky had described her grand plan for letting Eliza escape the confines of Camperdown Lodge, at least on weekends—Saturday afternoons, to be precise.

Eliza, perched on the side of her bed, heard Vicky out. She smiled wanly, far from being convinced. 'I don't think Papa would agree, dear Vicky.'

Vicky was like a dog with a bone and had no intention of being denied. 'Dearest Eliza, I sometimes wonder about you. Your father is a lawyer, a judge. So you need to make a case, mount an argument. Establishing what you want to do would be of some benefit. For him as well as you—if he would give his approval.'

Eliza shook her head. 'I still don't see how,' she began.

Vicky jumped in, pressing her own case. 'How about something like this. You would be engaged in good works. It would reflect well on the household—meaning your father. You shall be involved with a group of ... let's see ... decent Christian parishioners. And it's a good cause—the church restoration committee.' Vicky paused, to let her arguments sink in, then added slyly, 'No need to mention the possibility of meeting some eligible and interesting young gentlemen.'

Eliza smiled in spite of herself. 'I hadn't thought about the young men.'

'And let's hope your father doesn't either!' Vicky squealed in delight, pleased that Eliza had visibly brightened.

Eliza lowered her gaze and considered what Vicky had suggested. She finally looked up, still non-committal.

Vicky squirmed with impatience. 'Well,' she demanded, 'what do you think?'

Eliza had the ghost of a smile. 'I think you are a clever, devious little schemer.'

Vicky pouted. 'Talented, too.'

'Yes, and modest,' Eliza added.

They broke into laughter and threw their arms about each other.

Eliza walked Vicky to the gates. As the small pedestrian side gate was about to close, Vicky hesitated. 'Oh, I almost forgot. A character witness might be needed to support your case.'

Eliza, bewildered, produced a please-explain sort of expression.

'I shall whisper in Father's ear. Say something appropriate he might mention to the judge,' Vicky said.

And she was gone, leaving Eliza to put the case of the church restoration committee to the test.

James stood, staring from the study's window, hands clasped behind his back. Eliza sat on the far side of his desk, hands demurely in her lap. After what seemed to be an eternity, her father finally unclasped his hands and turned towards her.

'As you know,' James began, 'I'm off to Kyneton by tomorrow's packet, my dear. So perhaps this ought to wait my return. Give me time to give it proper consideration.'

This was not the response that Eliza wanted. She was well aware of how her father could play for time, wear down her resolve by attrition when she made any move for independence that did not accord with his own plans for her future. Eliza accepted that she had obviously not made her case as well as she might. She thought about how Vicky would have reacted to the non-committal response.

'There's really nothing to consider, Papa,' Eliza said, a touch primly. 'The church we worship at every Sunday simply needs some

volunteers, to help on the restoration committee. It's a worthwhile cause and, like Vicky, I should like to make my own contribution.'

'It's not quite so cut and dried, Eliza,' James said. 'It would mean your absence each Saturday. Just because your friend is involved, does not necessarily mean that you ought to do likewise. I really prefer to take some time to think it over.'

Eliza crossed fingers on her lap, trusting that such a move might minimise her forthcoming white lie. 'It's not just a matter of Vicky being involved, Papa. I understand Dr Sedgewick has made a generous donation to help with the work. I should imagine that the Reverend Kemp really appreciates the support and involvement of the master of Mont Eagle House and his daughter.'

James sensed a rat. But there was the nagging thought that his friend would appear to have greater sense of Christian responsibility than he did. And he was also conscious of his position in local circles, which implied certain obligations. 'I understand you would travel to and from St Stephen's in the Sedgewick carriage?'

Eliza nodded. 'Of course, Papa,' she replied, trying to maintain her calm, despite a thumping heart that told her she had won the day. As the elated Eliza drew the study door closed, she reminded herself she must get Vicky to encourage Dr Sedgewick to make a donation to the committee—which would transform her white lie into more of a prophecy. At least, she hoped so.



On a brisk February morning in 1847 a light mist hovered over the Twickenham countryside. Residents stirred into a new day. Some appeared at open doors, some in gardens, others collected eggs from chicken coops. A few earlybirds were out on the town's cobbled main street. Edward Donnithorne urged on his galloping horse across the open fields that ran down to the banks of the upper Thames.

Edward started each day with an early ride, except when the winter winds whistled across the countryside—often the harbingers of icy sleet and snow. A handsome man in his mid-thirties, he reined in his mount to a brisk trot as he approached Staines Road. This led to the entrance of Colne Lodge, a grand home with stables, extensive gardens, a tennis lawn, grounds that reached the River Colne and a private lake.

As Edward rode towards the stables, guiding his horse between the main house and a stone wall that separated Colne Lodge from Brinsworth Hall, a mansion occupied by William C. Tyler, Esquire, the confined driveway threw back the echoing clip-clopping of his horse on the cobbles. As usual, the stablemaster, Ridley, awaited his return.

Ridley was elderly and grey-haired, and stood ramrod straight, a legacy of his military background. He addressed Edward with the relaxed formality of a senior retainer along with the levity of one military man talking to another. 'Fine morning for a gallop, Colonel,' he said, accepting the reins as Edward dismounted.

'It's always a fine morning, to blow the cobwebs away, Ridley,' Edward replied in his breezy manner. He gave the horse a pat on its flanks, adding, 'Like me, Roger should be ready for his breakfast, eh?'

Ridley started to lead the horse to an open stall. 'It's ready and waiting for him, sir, as I trust is yours.'



Edward closed the door behind him and crossed the entrance chamber. From the distant morning room he could smell breakfast. Elizabeth Donnithorne, his attractive wife, and their studious-looking fourteen-year-old daughter Penelope looked up from the table as Edward bustled in, rubbing the circulation back to his hands.

'Why don't you wear gloves, Edward?' said Elizabeth. 'It's still chilly these mornings.'

Edward settled on a chair. 'Soldiers are not supposed to be mollicoddled. You know that, Elizabeth.'

Penelope piped up, 'You're an officer, Father. Not a soldier.'

Edward turned to his daughter and assumed an earnest demeanor. 'My child, the only difference between an officer and a soldier is that the officer is supposed to be a gentleman.' Henrietta, the maid on breakfast duty, stood, waiting to serve. 'Aha!' Edward exclaimed. 'I see that Henrietta is waiting to ascertain this morn's gastronomical desires.'

'Father means breakfast, Henrietta,' said a deadpan Penelope. The maid managed a nervous smile, uncomfortable with the banter steered in her direction. Penelope scraped back her chair, dabbing a napkin at her lips. 'Must be going now. Can't afford to be late,' she announced, reaching down to give her mother a goodbye peck on the cheek.

Edward feigned indignation. 'What! No breakfast!'

Penelope shrugged. 'Already had it.'

'She means a glass of milk and some cold toast,' Elizabeth elaborated. Edward shook his head. 'That's not breakfast.'

Penelope hurried over to Edward and gave him a peck on the cheek. 'Goodbye, Father. Ridley will be waiting with the carriage.'

Once Penelope was gone, Elizabeth produced a sealed envelope. 'This came for you, Edward. I gather it's from Father.'

Edward accepted the letter. 'So ... a report from the colonies.' He picked up a knife and sawed away at the envelope's bindings.

Elizabeth turned to Henrietta. 'I'll have the usual.' She looked towards Edward. 'What about you?'

Edward had the envelope open and was fishing for the contents. 'Oh, er, yes. The usual,' he responded absently.

Elizabeth watched Edward study his mail. 'Well?' she asked, becoming impatient. 'What does it say?'

Edward laid the letter aside. 'Father's enterprises continue to prosper apparently. And as my young sister will be twenty-one later

in the year, he talks about throwing a coming-of-age party for Eliza. Of course, he would like us to attend.'

Elizabeth was sceptical. 'Aside from undertaking a journey to the other end of the world, would the 16th Queen's Lancers approve of Colonel Donnithorne disappearing for six months?'

Edward nodded. 'Afraid not. Might lose the empire in that period.'

Elizabeth considered, turning over something in her mind. 'You know, I think it would make more sense for Eliza to be here. In London. In time for the Season.'

Edward knew where she was coming from. 'Hmm, I see. Lots of parties, balls, receptions, country weekends and ...'

'And eligible young men,' Elizabeth added.

Edward crooked his head with a knowing smile. 'Father has his own ideas about who would be an acceptable suitor for Eliza.'

Elizabeth was not surprised by her husband's response. 'Just a suggestion, darling. But I do think your sister ought to visit. It's been a while since you last saw her.'

Edward went back to the letter. 'Father also asks to be remembered to the Arundels. Suggests we invite them to our next soiree.'

Elizabeth was taken aback. 'Why would he do that? Surely he's not that close to Lord and Lady Arundel?'

Edward assumed a conspiratorial expression. 'Well, I have good reason to believe that Father is more interested in their son and heir!'

Elizabeth was incredulous. 'What! Not Charles?'

Edward nodded a knowing smile.

Elizabeth was in disbelief. 'Oh, no! Not Charles Arundel! Not for Eliza!'

Edward was amused. 'After all, my dearest, the Arundels do live in a castle.'

'And so did Henry the Eighth,' Elizabeth shot back, her indignation starting to melt as Edward broke into a laugh.



The packet which James and Vashi boarded for the sail down the east coast to Port Philip ran into strong headwinds. As a result they almost failed to make the connection with Cobb and Co's Tuesday's run to Bendigo via Kyneton, their ultimate destination.

Eight hours later they alighted from the stage coach. They were met by William Kelly, manager of St Agnes Station, who took them the final miles to James's latest acquisition by carriage. Kelly was a burly man with a shock of red hair and bushy eyebrows. He was typical of the unsophisticated, knock-about characters common to remote parts of the continent. A taciturn individual, Kelly loaded the visitors' baggage onto the carriage, closed the cabin door once they were settled and clambered up front. With a crack of his whip, the two-horse team took up the load. James and Vashi were close to journey's end.

St Agnes Station was far removed from a country farmhouse. It was a fine property with a handsome brick homestead with bay windows and slender pillars supporting a welcoming wrought-iron trimmed verandah that skirted and protected the home from the worst of the colony's burning sun. Some distance behind the main house was a walled compound that enclosed the station's stables, coach house, storage buildings, and the living quarters of the domestic and outdoor retainers.

James and Vashi stepped down from the carriage, the dust kicked up by its arrival still hovering in the air. On the main steps stood Kelly's wife, Ann. A roustabout, Toby, waited in the background.

William Kelly started to unload the baggage, leaving his wife to speak. That struck James as rather odd. Ann Kelly was a comely woman in her early thirties, her glossy dark hair drawn back from finely chiselled features. She looked at the world through large blue-grey eyes, with a commanding air that suggested self-confidence and

authority. 'Welcome to St Agnes, Mr Donnithorne,' she said. 'We trust you had a safe and pleasant journey.'

That the attractive and clearly articulate young woman was married to William Kelly was surely living proof that opposites did indeed attract, James mused. He stopped in his tracks at the foot of the steps and returned Ann Kelly's warm smile. 'Mrs Kelly, I presume.'

Ann nodded, and gave a brief curtsey which maintained her dignity with no suggestion of awe at meeting the master for the first time. 'We are honoured by your visit, sir, and that of ...' She paused, uncertain who Vashi was.

'This is Mr Vashi Larkman, my personal assistant and business manager,' James said.

Ann Kelly gave Vashi a cool, brief glance, though no other sign of acknowledgement. She descended the steps and stood directly before James.

'We had a tolerable journey, Mrs Kelly,' James said. 'Though I must say, it looks pleasant to be here.'

'We are pleased you like what you see, sir,' she said in a quiet voice, which held the echo of an unspoken message James could not easily ignore. It had the effect of ruffling his composure, which inwardly disturbed him.

'We, er, do indeed, Madam,' James responded in what was intended as a business-like manner, though he sensed it lacked conviction. This, too, unbalanced his composure. For a few moments James and Ann Kelly stood by the steps, locked into a mutual gaze. Vashi was disturbed by his master's out-of-character behaviour and sensed danger. The woman was just too confident for her station.



St Stephen's, one of Sydney's long-established churches, albeit now due for some renovation, stood on Church Street, off King Street, just over

a mile from Camperdown Lodge. Its cemetery, a final resting place for rich and poor, included the graves of some well-known figures.

The pastor, the Reverend Andrew Kemp, took up a position between the impressive altar and the first rows of polished wooden pews. Saturday afternoon was drawing to a close. Kemp eyed the restoration committee members working at small tables in the transept. He was a fresh-faced and engaging man in his late thirties, married to the formidable chief organist, an omnipresent figure who missed nothing within the holy citadel.

The Reverend cleared his throat. 'That is all for today, valued committee members,' he began with a smile. 'Now, if you would kindly hand in your materials and letters for the postal appeal—hopefully to generous donors—we shall adjourn until next week.' Then, as was his custom, he walked up the aisle to the main entrance to position himself on the steps for farewells. To the scraping of chairs and the scuffling of feet and murmured conversations, the volunteers began to take their leave.

Eliza and Vicky rose and joined the exodus of fellow workers. Eliza nodded at the knots of members straggling up the aisle and whispered quietly to Vicky, 'What was it you said about meeting eligible young men?'

Vicky maintained a straight face. The committee was mostly made up of prim elderly parishioners, young women like themselves, juveniles who made it obvious they would have preferred to be somewhere else, and a sprinkling of solemn males who were not exactly the answers to a maiden's prayer. 'Don't be so horrid! And hard to please,' she hissed, trying to avoid being overheard. They broke into laughter, which attracted curious glances in the house of God.

They were to receive a more friendly reception as they emerged. Reverend Kemp farewelled his workers, shaking hands with the men, exchanging pleasantries with the women, and ruffling the hair of the

young ones. He bestowed a warm smile on the two friends. 'I trust you enjoyed your first day with us, Miss Eliza?'

Eliza turned on one of her dazzling smiles for the clergyman. 'Very much, Reverend Kemp! After all, it's a lovely church.'

The response was music to Kemp's ears—he was very proud of his charge. He turned to Vicky. 'Make sure you bring her back next week.'

Vicky gave him an eye-fluttering and knowing smile. 'You may count on it, Reverend,' she breathed in a soft voice.

As they rode homeward in the Sedgewick carriage, Vicky gently elbowed Eliza in a conspiratorial gesture that demanded she pay attention to what was about to be said. 'You know, that Andrew Kemp is rather yummy.'

'Vicky! He's a man of the cloth!'

Vicky shrugged. 'Hmmm. He is still a man!'

Negotiating the late afternoon traffic, Horace the coachman wondered what on earth could be so amusing within the carriage to produce so much merriment.



In the modest Lennox Street cottage, the hours had flown by as if on wings. Outside, a chilly evening settled over the borough of Newtown. The last cups of tea had grown cold and there were only crumbs left on the plate on the small table the trio sat around.

To Colbert Moore it had been as if the world had stood still. Elizabeth paused in the dimming light, causing Moore to glance up from his notebook. She looked weary. Moore realised, with a pang of guilt, how late it was. He put down his pencil. 'Oh, I'm so sorry. I didn't realise the time, Miss Elizabeth. Please forgive me.'

Elizabeth nodded agreement. 'Perhaps we have covered enough for one day, Mr Moore.' Moore stood up, gathering his notes, as he

prepared to take his leave. The answer to the question he wanted to put was provided without his asking.

‘Shall we say next Saturday, Mr Moore?’ It was more of a command than a question, and one to which he readily agreed. The coming week would drag by slowly until he could pick up Elizabeth’s narrative again.

Chapter Six

In the mid-afternoon, hours before dinner would appear, Eliza slipped into the kitchen in search of a morsel. As she expected, there was nobody about. Margaret usually rested after lunch had been served, and so did Rose and Angela once the dishes had been dealt with. And with Eliza's father and Vashi absent, the household seemed more lethargic.

She paused by a side table where a large bowl was piled with fruit. She picked up an apple and was about to take a bite when she heard some noise coming from the adjoining servants' station. It sounded as if someone were weeping. Eliza went to investigate. She came upon Mrs Humphries, slumped in a chair, sniffing, a picture of misery.

'Are you all right, Mrs H?' Eliza asked.

Mrs Humphries rose from her chair, her face smeared with tears. She tried to put on a brave face. 'Oh, Miss Eliza. I, er ... see you have a nice apple there.'

Eliza was not to be put off. 'What has upset you?'

The housekeeper shrugged. 'It's nothing really. Just an old woman's thing.'

Eliza produced a lace handkerchief, put the apple aside, and dabbed softly at Mrs Humphries' face. 'You are not an old woman. Far from it. Though something's wrong,' she said. 'Let's see if we can sort things out.'

Eliza guided the distressed housekeeper into the kitchen and

settled her into a chair. She drew up one for herself. 'Things cannot be all that bad,' she said in as reassuring a tone as she could muster.

'It's just that ... well, I shall really miss Camperdown Lodge so,' Mrs Humphries began. 'I've had many happy moments here. Everyone has been so kind.'

Eliza considered, then observed slyly, 'Well, perhaps not everyone?'

Mrs Humphries, unbalanced by the young mistress's directness, was unsure just how to respond. Eliza went on, pulling a conspiratorial expression, 'I think we all know just who the dark presence is within the household.'

Mrs Humphries was instinctively diplomatic, well trained after years spent in service. 'Well, Mr Vashi has assumed many responsibilities to lighten the burden on your good father, Miss Eliza,' she began.

'Yes,' Eliza responded, 'and in the process has assumed much influence under this roof and beyond.' There was an awkward silence, punctuated by the clacking of a large wall clock. Eliza broke the spell. 'He was the reason behind your resignation, wasn't he?'

Mrs Humphries glanced about, as if the walls had ears, then turned back to Eliza. 'It was becoming most difficult to carry out my duties as I believed they should be done.'

Eliza considered again. 'You would like to remain here. Yes?' she asked quietly.

The housekeeper hesitated. 'No matter, Miss. I fear it is way too late for that.'

Eliza smiled. 'As my friend, Vicky, would say, "Fiddlesticks", Mrs H. So ... why not stay?' Mrs Humphries began to shake her head. Eliza pushed ahead. 'You'll have my support. And I know Papa does not want to lose you.'

The housekeeper was uncomfortable at the turn of the conversation. 'Bless you, Miss Eliza. But ... having resigned, it would be most embarrassing, and ...'

Eliza cut her short. 'The master returns from St Agnes next week. So let's give him a homecoming present. One he should appreciate. Tell him his search for a housekeeper has been resolved!'

Eliza did not give Mrs Humphries an opportunity to respond one way or the other. To her the decision was made. Eliza wrapped her arms around the housekeeper in a warm hug. Once released from the embrace Mrs Humphries' mouth trembled, with tears returning. Eliza again produced her handkerchief and patted at the tears in a motherly gesture. 'Everything is going to be all right. Trust me,' she said quietly.

Mrs Humphries struggled to produce a wan smile.



Another Saturday afternoon had arrived and, as arranged, Eliza arrived at Mont Eagle House to join Vicky for the short journey to St Stephen's. Eliza reached up to an ornate brass knocker in the shape of an eagle. A minute passed with no response. Eliza was about to grasp the eagle again. The doors were opened by a flustered maid. 'Good afternoon, Miss Eliza,' she said, a touch breathless.

'Hello, Betty. Is Miss Vicky waiting ... or should I come in?' Eliza asked. It was time for them to leave and Horace would be appearing with the carriage at any moment.

Dr Sedgewick appeared from the dimness. 'I'm afraid Vicky has been confined to bed,' he said. 'She's come down with a heavy dose of influenza.'

Eliza was concerned. 'Oh, I'm so sorry. Is she ... ?'

Malcolm Sedgewick smiled reassuringly. 'She will be all right—if she follows doctor's orders and rests for a few days.'

Eliza was relieved. 'Please tell Vicky I shall call on her when she feels up to it. Now I should go home.'

Dr Sedgewick was surprised. 'Aren't you supposed to be off to church?'

Eliza shrugged. 'I was. But now that Vicky is sick ...' she began.

Dr Sedgewick crooked his head. 'Why not go, anyway? I forgot to stand down the carriage. So, your transport is waiting!'

Eliza was uncertain. 'I, er, I'm not really sure if ...'

Dr Sedgewick assumed a playfully sly expression. 'If your father is upset about you going alone, you can tell him it was all my idea. Fair enough, Eliza?'

Eliza thought about it. She looked up and beamed one of her smiles, which said it all.



It was much the same as Eliza's first afternoon with the restoration committee, although she missed the company of Vicky.

Andrew Kemp made an early announcement. The conversation among the volunteers trailed into silence. 'If we were in school today, and not at a busy working bee,' he began with an engaging smile, 'I should be saying that you are to be rewarded with an "early mark" this afternoon. There is to be a wedding ceremony later, and there will be people arriving soon to decorate the church and arrange the flowers.' He paused for effect, then ended with the good news. 'So you may conclude your efforts within the next half hour.'

Eliza looked around at her immediate neighbours. Their reactions suggested that indeed they might have been in a school classroom, elated by the promise of early release from studies. She was about to start winding up her work when something distracted her. It was a feeling of being watched, a sensory scratching on the nape of her neck. She turned around. A young man she had not noticed before was seated in the third row of the gleaming timber pews. He returned her gaze, acknowledged it with an inclination of the head.

For some moments Eliza returned the young man's gaze with unwavering blue eyes. At first she thought he might be someone

she should have recognised—a social or business acquaintance of her father, one of those who often arrived at Camperdown Lodge on business errands, or for meetings or lunches with her father. The stranger returned Eliza's scrutiny with a knowing smile, which told her that most likely he was not familiar with the household.

She turned back to her work, feeling foolish at having held eye contact.

George Cuthbertson continued to watch the golden-haired girl. He bore the ghost of a smile.

Eliza tried to concentrate on her work, but was disturbed by the impudent young man. He made her feel insecure, despite the ecclesiastical surroundings. She was distracted for a second by being obliged to respond to a remark by a fellow worker. She took the opportunity to sneak another brief glance at the stranger.

George Cuthbertson cranked up what had been a lingering smile, which told Eliza her curiosity, and perhaps interest, had been noted.

It was becoming too much to deal with. The committee would be adjourning within thirty minutes, so she decided to take her leave. Eliza scooped her papers up into a neat pile on the table, scraped back her chair and murmured farewell to her neighbours. She made for a side door, which would avoid the main aisle and pews.

At the main entrance on Church Street, she paused to enjoy the reassurance of the warm afternoon sun, the familiar sounds of passing traffic over on King Street. Eliza felt relieved and, once more in control, the sense of insecurity put to flight. She was annoyed with herself at reacting in such an uncharacteristic way.

Her sense of liberation was short lived. She heard the crunch of footsteps on the gravel driveway behind her. Eliza turned and confronted the stranger in the pews.

George Cuthbertson came to a halt and smiled. 'I realise that it would be best to be formally introduced,' he began, 'but since we

have no mutual acquaintance to effect this, I seem to be obliged to do the honours.'

Eliza's confidence returned, ignited by the impudence of this stranger who seemed to be just too presumptuous for his own station. 'And what prompts you to imagine that we should be introduced?' she responded frostily.

Cuthbertson shrugged, 'Of course, you are absolutely right.' He broke off, seemingly unsure how best to proceed. Eliza pursed her lips, unimpressed.

He tried to muster a confident smile. 'Well, since I have taken the liberty of going this far ... the name is Cuthbertson. George Cuthbertson,' he said, realising it sounded appallingly lame.

'I shall ask you again,' Eliza said. 'Why do you persist with the belief that we ought to be introduced? You're a stranger!'

Cuthbertson knew, despite his resolve, he was fast running out of conversational ammunition. 'Because, because if we are not introduced, I shall never have the opportunity of making your acquaintance.'

Eliza was mildly amused by the stumbling and naive, yet disarming, response, although she did her best to conceal her reaction. 'Next, I suppose, you will tell me you are present here today simply to make the acquaintance of a stranger?'

Cuthbertson assumed a serious demeanor. 'Actually I heard about the parishioners' work for the church. I wanted to see for myself.'

Eliza, sceptical, asked, 'Oh, I see. And have you been inspired by what you have seen?'

'More than I ever imagined possible,' he replied.

Eliza suppressed a smile and decided to deflect the poorly veiled compliment. 'We can always use willing hands in the good cause, Mr Cuthbertson,' she said, very businesslike.

'Please call me George ... it's, er, not so formal.'

Eliza was reminded of another event in her life some years earlier.

She found herself saying, 'We have a horse called George. As I recall, he was the cause of some pain and trouble.'

Cuthbertson was bewildered, though he tried to make light of it. 'Well, I promise to be better behaved than my four-legged namesake,' he smiled.

'As I recall, I was the party guilty of poor behaviour,' Eliza said with a faint smile. George Cuthbertson was none the wiser. Eliza decided to show some pity. 'I'm Eliza,' she volunteered.

'Eliza ... it's a lovely name,' George said softly, as if to himself.

The creaking clip-clopping of Horace with the Sedgewick carriage announced its approach into Church Street. 'That's for me,' Eliza said. She extended a gloved hand to George. 'Your interest in the church is most commendable. Now I must be off.'

George knew he was running out of time. 'Will you be here? Next Saturday? Eliza?' he stammered.

'The committee meets each week. Volunteers are always appreciated,' she said, making it sound formal and non-committal. The carriage crunched to a stop.

As the coachman held the door open for Eliza, George told himself, 'If she looks back, I may have a chance.' He crossed his fingers.

As Eliza was about to enter the carriage she hesitated, then lowered her head so her bonnet would not snag. Horace pushed the door shut, clambered up to take the reins and, with a quick tug, the carriage was on the move.

George Cuthbertson stood by the gates through which the committee now straggled. He watched the carriage slip from sight as it turned into King Street. He hunched his shoulders disappointedly and uncrossed his fingers.



Vicky sat bolt upright. Her eyes were bright with excitement, despite

her influenza. 'And how old is George?' she asked Eliza, who sat on the edge of the bed.

Eliza shook her head, affecting impatience, though inwardly she relished sharing the details of her encounter. 'It was a polite exchange. He was a stranger. He seemed interested in the work of the committee—at least he said he did.'

Vicky did not exactly buy her friend's version of events. 'Fiddlesticks! He was flirting with you! Now, how old would he be?'

'About twenty-one. Perhaps twenty-two or thereabouts,' Eliza said, a little primly. 'And I am sure he was not flirting with me,' she added, without conviction.

Vicky thought for a few moments. 'Twenty-two. Hmm. I'd say about the right age. The man ought to be older.'

'Really, Vicky. You make it sound like ... well ... as though it were something else.' Eliza floundered, although she was delighted at the interest she had kindled.

Vicky brushed aside her friend's assumed reticence. 'Oh, you silly ninny! Your George Cuthbertson doesn't give a hoot for the mouldy fuddy duddy committee. It's you he's interested in.'

Eliza started to shake her head, but Vicky was now in full flight. 'And just think, you'll be seeing him on Saturday! How delicious!' Vicky crossed her arms about her knees and hugged herself in excitement.

'He is not my George. I did not give him any encouragement.'

'Then you must give him some encouragement!' Vicky continued, adding, 'I can hardly wait!'

Eliza was unsure. 'Hardly wait?'

Vicky tossed her auburn locks in a gesture of impatience. 'For next Saturday, silly! You must introduce me to your George. I wish to approve him.'

Eliza saw the humorous side to Vicky's earnestness. 'Again, he is not my George. And, Miss Smarty Pants, what makes you so sure he will turn up, anyway?'

Vicky fell back against her pillows. 'Oh, he'll be there, dear Eliza. George will be there. Just you wait and see!'

Eliza smiled, crooked her head in a gesture of compassion for her bedridden best friend: Vicky, the irrepressible.



Hundreds of miles away, St Agnes Station was brightly lit, a glittering oasis in the sea of darkness that had settled over the bush. Insects snapped and the clacking of marsh frogs echoed in the depressions below the station's lake. It was Friday, the night before James and Vashi were leaving, their investigative and audit work of the property completed. Ann Kelly had planned the farewell dinner carefully, and she ensured that the white wine was chilled, the Madeira on call, with brandy and cigars awaiting in the study.

The meal was coming to an end. James patted his lips with a table napkin, glanced around the table, and addressed William Kelly. 'Well, Mr Kelly, now that all the paperwork, bookkeeping and general records are to be the responsibility of Mr Vashi, you should have more time to implement the changes we have discussed.'

Anxious to please and with perhaps a few Madeiras too many under his belt, Kelly smiled broadly. 'Certainly, Mr Donnithorne, sir. Things'll be done just as you wish. I have always liked being a doingfarmer, instead of a writing farmer!'

James smiled. 'A quaint way of putting it, Mr Kelly. Yet an adequate description. Just make sure all the numbers and details are received by Mr Vashi each month, and he will handle matters from there.'

Vashi visibly pumped up, pleased his importance was being emphasised.

Ann Kelly turned to James. 'You must have many matters of business awaiting your return at Camperdown Lodge, sir.'

James nodded. 'Too many, Mrs Kelly. Not all involve business.'

Ann raised an eyebrow, prompting James to elaborate. 'Well, I have the matter of finding a new housekeeper. The present incumbent, Mrs Humphries, an excellent woman—as Mr Vashi here will attest ...' James paused, waiting for his assistant to agree.

'Oh, er, yes. Excellent,' came Vashi's lacklustre endorsement, which was not lost upon Ann Kelly.

James, oblivious to Vashi's lack of enthusiasm, continued. 'Mrs Humphries is leaving us for personal reasons. She will be missed. As you are aware, I have a daughter, Eliza ...'

Ann Kelly nodded, encouraging James to unburden himself.

'We do have a close relationship, but Eliza needs—how can I put it—she needs a maternal influence. A role model of sorts. To guide her. Especially when I'm absent.'

'I understand exactly what you are facing, sir,' Ann Kelly said. 'As you say, even the most loving paternal relationship ought to be balanced—complemented, even—by a mature maternal influence.'

James took another sip of wine. 'I can see that you have grasped the situation, Mrs Kelly.'

Vashi sat stony-faced, far from pleased at the attention bestowed upon the mistress of St Agnes. It seemed to him that the Kelly woman was starting to exert some sort of influence on James.

Mrs Kelly was not yet done. 'If I may respectfully suggest, sir. It appears that you require a person who is both a competent household manager and also a governess of maturity, versed in the ways and needs of young women.'

'Aha! But pray, where does one find such a person?'

Ann Kelly responded with an enigmatic smile, lowered her eyelashes and looked demurely down to the table.

James drained his glass and sat quietly, digesting Mrs Kelly's advice.

The uneasy Vashi looked across to William Kelly, who appeared ignorant of the dynamics at the table. Kelly reached out and poured

himself another glass of Madeira. He would be little help clipping his wife's wings, Vashi decided. He tried to seek some comfort in the knowledge they would be departing in the morning. Outside, above the muted chanting of the frogs, came the eerie call of a dingo. To Vashi, the cry of the native dog was an omen.



Eliza and Vicky exchanged bewildered glances as they stood inside the entrance of St Stephen's. 'Where is everyone?' asked Vicky.

Eliza shrugged. 'I suppose this is Saturday?'

They eyed the rows of empty pews. The verger appeared from behind. 'Oh ... Miss Sedgewick ... and Miss Donnithorne!' he exclaimed, clearly surprised.

Vicky turned to him. 'Just what has become of everyone today?'

'Didn't you know? Today's meeting of the committee was cancelled.' He added, 'As I recall, it was a last-minute decision. Just as last week's meeting was being adjourned.'

The penny dropped. 'Oh, dear,' Eliza said. 'Now I remember. I had to leave a little early last Saturday,' she said, recalling her encounter with George Cuthbertson.

The verger smiled reassuringly. 'You are welcome to remain. Perhaps to pray. Or meditate. Now, if you will excuse me, I have some matters to attend to.'

Again, left alone, Vicky assumed a theatrically sad expression. 'Looks like I won't be meeting your George after all.'

Eliza smiled. 'Well, look on the bright side. We can stay and pray. Or meditate.'

Vicky pretended to take a swipe at Eliza's bonnet. 'I have a better idea. Let's go and spoil Horace's afternoon siesta!' As the Sedgewick carriage had not been required for other assignments, Horace had parked in the shade of a spreading tree across the street from the

church. With a mischievous grin, Vicky reached out and rapped on the window glass. A few moments later Horace's florid face appeared. Eliza and Vicky exchanged smugly satisfied smiles as the drowsy Horace clambered out, trying his best not to appear half-asleep. He fumbled around, managing to regain his balance, and held the door open for them. Vicky climbed aboard. Eliza was about to follow when someone called her name.

'Miss Donnithorne! Wait!' George Cuthbertson was running towards the carriage. He arrived, partly out of breath. 'Thank goodness I saw you. I understand there's no meeting today!' he managed to gasp, though smiling at his unexpected good fortune.

Conscious of Vicky's bright-eyed and knowing reaction to the arrival of George, Eliza tried to maintain her composure. 'I was unaware the arrangements were changed either,' she said, attempting to sound cool and unruffled, despite her beating heart, which sabotaged her efforts. 'So we are about to return home,' she added.

The plural 'we' alerted George to Vicky's presence, who appeared at the door of the carriage. Eliza, still flustered, volunteered, 'This is my friend, Vicky Sedgewick.' She added, for Vicky's involvement, 'And this is Mr George Cuthbertson.'

George returned Vicky's smile. 'It's George, Miss Sedgewick. I'm delighted to make your acquaintance.'

There was an awkward silence. Eliza agonised, feeling trapped and unprepared. In desperation she managed, 'Mr Cuthbertson ... George ... is interested in the work of our restoration group.'

Vicky tried to suppress another knowing expression—it was a half-hearted effort. 'Oh, yes. I am sure he is.'

There was another silence. 'I say, since we appear to have some unexpected time on our hands, perhaps you will both do me the honour of taking tea?' George asked.

Eliza was uncertain and looked at Vicky. Her friend was in no doubt and had her own agenda.

'As a matter of fact,' Vicky began, 'I suddenly recall something, er, something I need to do. It had completely slipped my mind.' Eliza was put off balance. Vicky turned to George. 'But there's no need to keep you both. Enjoy the tea. And, er, I'll be off to do my chores.'

Eliza went to protest but Vicky did not give her a chance. Smiling at Eliza, she cut in, 'I will send Horace back with the carriage for you. No need to concern yourself.'

Eliza was feeling increasingly trapped. She shook her head. 'I really ought to be going ...' she began.

Vicky ignored her. She turned to Horace. 'Say in about one hour. Be back here.' Horace, who was still standing by the open door, nodded. 'Good. So you understand the arrangement,' Vicky added.

'Of course, Miss Vicky. I certainly do.'

'Excellent. Then it's settled,' Vicky declared in obvious approval. George was delighted—and impressed by Vicky's organisational ability—but thought he should add, 'Are you sure you cannot join us for tea?'

'Perhaps another time, George.' Vicky looked to Eliza with a glint of triumph. 'I trust you both enjoy the tea.'



Eliza and George, seated by the tearoom window, watched in silence as the young waitress placed their tea and cakes on a small circular table.

George reached across and lifted the teapot. 'I'll be mother. How do you take tea, Eliza?'

'A little milk. No sugar, thank you,' she replied, a touch primly, still trying to come to terms with the situation she found herself in.

'Sweet enough, eh?' George smiled as he tilted the pot.

'That's most probably a matter of opinion.' Eliza watched George do the honours. 'So ... you're domesticated?'

George shrugged and started to pour his own cup. 'Just trying to impress you.' They sipped their tea in an awkward silence, each unsure what to say next. George took the initiative. 'I like your friend.'

'Yes. And so you should. Vicky can be quite the schemer.'

George laughed. 'And thank goodness for that!'

Another silence descended on the little table. Again George took the lead. 'Did you think I'd come?'

'I didn't know what to think,' Eliza replied guardedly.

George leaned forward, and in a quiet, conspiratorial tone told her, 'I'll make a confession. It has been the longest week in my life. I thought Saturday would never arrive.'

Eliza considered for a moment. 'Then I'm pleased you survived the week,' she smiled.

The hour passed in a mix of small talk, much of it keyed to learning about each other. Eliza found George to be an easy conversationalist with a sense of humour, things often lacking in most of the young men her father would produce for her approval.

George lifted the teapot. 'Sure you don't want ...?'

Eliza shook her head. 'No thank you.'

George indicated the cake slices. 'You haven't tried ...'

Eliza smiled. 'We seem to have been too busy. Talking.' She glanced out to the street. 'I think it's time I was going. Vicky said an hour.'

George pouted. 'This has been the shortest hour ever!'

'Your longest week. And now, shortest hour.' Eliza said playfully.

George raised his arm and signalled to their waitress for the bill. 'I'll walk you to the carriage.'

'Thank you for the tea. And the conversation,' Eliza said politely.

As they walked over to the waiting carriage, George said, 'I'm still rather confused about your experience with my namesake.'

Eliza looked confused. George prompted, 'George. The horse.'

'Oh, that George,' she laughed. 'I'm afraid I was rather naughty.'

I always wanted to ride but Papa would say no. Well, one day, I did try to ride George, but I had a tumble.'

'Hmm, you seemed to have survived the experience.'

'Just,' Eliza smiled. 'It was painful at the time.'

'And, I take it, you have now mastered the art of ...'

Eliza pulled a rueful smile. 'Afraid not. But I still have my ambitions.'

George considered. 'Perhaps we should do something about that. More exciting than a cup of tea.'

After a brief pause, Eliza said, 'Yes. Perhaps we should.'



Betty opened the door of Mont Eagle House. 'Good afternoon, Miss Eliza,' she said. 'I believe Miss Vicky is expecting you.'

Eliza swept past the maidservant. 'I should imagine she is.'

Betty sensed something was afoot. She called after Eliza, 'She is resting in her quarters.'

Vicky put aside the book she had been reading. Eliza placed her hands on hips. 'Well! Aren't you the clever one!'

Vicky remained deadpan. 'I gather you have come to thank me.'

Eliza effected indignation. 'Leaving me like that! With a perfect stranger!'

Vicky produced the glimmer of a smile. 'But he is rather nice.'

Eliza abandoned the hapless victim act. 'And lucky for you!'

'So, tell your clever friend. What happened?'

'Not much to tell, really,' said Eliza. 'George works in an office.'

Vicky was hungry for all the details. 'What kind of office?'

'Something to do with ships ... or was it shipping things? Anyway, he's a clerk.'

Vicky was not entirely impressed. 'A clerk? Hmm. Must be a shipping clerk.'

'Yes. At least he has a proper job. Not like the people always visiting Papa. Dressed in stale suits, smelling of pomade. Endless meetings debating about what's written on pieces of paper.'

Vicky was amused by Eliza's descriptions. 'And when might you be seeing George again? You are going to see him?'

Eliza puffed up and tried to appear casual. 'If you must know,' she began, 'we are going riding.'

Vicky pulled a face. 'Riding! That brings back some unfortunate memories!'

Eliza ignored the girlhood incident. 'And what's more, you are to be my alibi.'

Vicky feigned indignance. 'Alibi? You must mean accomplice!'

They broke into laughter.

Chapter Seven

At two o'clock the next Tuesday, Elizabeth burst in on Margaret and Mrs Humphries, who were bustling about doing kitchen chores. Breathlessly, she announced, 'The Signal Station has reported the packet from Port Philip is about to berth. Thomas is just leaving to collect the master!'

Mrs Humphries turned to Margaret. 'They will be home within two hours. They will need to be fed.' To Elizabeth she added, 'You had better alert Mistress Eliza.' With a nod, Elizabeth hurried away to deliver the news upstairs.

As was customary when James was absent for an extended period the housekeeper, cook, Elizabeth and Sarah would join Eliza on the main steps in a show of welcome and respect.

Eliza reached out and squeezed a nervous Mrs Humphries' arm, reassuring her that all would be well. The housekeeper responded with a faint smile.

It was not long before the carriage turned into the driveway from King Street and crunched its way to a creaking stop near the steps. The two-horse team snorted and nodded their heads after the brisk run from the waterfront. Thomas clambered down to open the door. First to appear was James, followed by Vashi.

Unable to contain herself, Eliza ran down the steps to her father, who scooped her up in an embrace. Once free of the hug, Eliza exclaimed, 'Welcome home, Papa!' James held Eliza at arm's length,

as though he could not see enough of her. 'It's wonderful to be back! And to see my beautiful daughter again!'

Vashi walked past them to the steps and pushed through the small group. He disappeared within, having no role in the welcome.

James continued to beam at Eliza. 'My child,' he said, clearly excited, 'I have a surprise.'

Eliza cut him short. 'You know I love your surprises, Papa!'

James turned to the carriage where Thomas stood, still holding open the door. Eliza followed his gaze, her curiosity aroused. An imposing, smartly dressed woman, her dark hair tied back in a bun, her bonnet in hand, stepped from the carriage. James turned back to Eliza smiling. 'May I present Mrs Kelly!'

Eliza was mystified. 'I, I don't understand, Papa.'

James looked back to Mrs Kelly. 'Mrs Kelly has graciously consented to assume the position of housekeeper at Camperdown Lodge!'

Eliza was stunned. James took Mrs Kelly by the elbow and guided her over to Eliza. 'May I present my daughter, Miss Eliza Emily.'

Mrs Kelly extended a gloved hand. Eliza ignored the introduction and turned away to look at Mrs Humphries on the steps, dismayed and helpless at the turn of events.

Mrs Humphries face had collapsed. With her head bowed, she turned away to push past Margaret, Elizabeth and Sarah unsteadily and disappear into the house.

Eliza swung back to her father. 'Oh, Papa! How could you?'

James was bewildered. Eliza shook her head, still in disbelief. She turned away and hurried in the wake of Mrs Humphries.

James, his astonishment beginning to turn to anger, called after her, 'Eliza! What is going on? Return this instant!' Confused and now embarrassed, he looked over to Mrs Kelly. 'You will need to forgive my daughter, Mrs Kelly. Something must be ailing the girl.'

Mrs Kelly produced a sympathetic smile and spoke in a low-

pitched voice that was both gentle and understanding. 'You have been away for some time, sir. And young women of tender years do tend to have their personal moments, which we do not always find easy to comprehend.'

'You are most understanding, Mrs Kelly. Sarah will help make you comfortable and attend to your needs. Tomorrow I will introduce you to the staff.'



Eliza and Mrs Humphries were not the only members of the household to be unsettled by Ann Kelly's appointment. Vashi had been shocked when James had arranged with William Kelly to release his wife into service at Camperdown Lodge, promising him a housekeeper for St Agnes, and a generous salary for Mrs Kelly, plus a two-year contract, with an option for renewal.

Worse was James's obvious obsession that the Kelly woman would be the perfect answer to his need for a housekeeper and mentor to Eliza. Vashi was sure that Mrs Kelly had her own plans as far as James was concerned, and who would know what else. He sat in his office and brooded, wondering how best he could bring the manipulative new housekeeper undone, and very aware that she might usurp his own influence with the master.



Colne Lodge was ablaze with lights and looked more like a fairyland palace than a grand house on the outskirts of London. A stream of carriages entered through the mansion's main gates and set down their elegantly attired guests at the entrance, then moved on, past the stables and down the private road that led to a distant ornamental lake, to park in a long line.

The chatter of arriving guests, the echoing rattle of the carriages and the muted sound of music from inside signalled another of the soirees for which the Donnithornes were well known. Many of the guests had made the short journey from the West End and northwest London, others had come from country homes and estates, and there were some local people. The latter included the likes of William C. Tyler, Esquire, from Bronsworth Hall, the Alister Sharmans of Gothic House and one guest who enjoyed celebrity status.

This was the writer Charles Dickens, who each year spent some months at a comfortable cottage on nearby Eel Pie Island in the upper Thames, a favourite retreat where he wrote much of his work, free from distractions and with assured privacy. Dickens and Edward Donnithorne were members of the same London club, and the two families were well known to each other. When he was staying on the island, Dickens was often a guest at Colne Lodge. Edward was aware that Dickens, as a social reformer concerned with the plight of the disadvantaged, may be considered by some of his guests to be a shade too socialist and perhaps critical of their positions and lifestyle.

Edward and Elizabeth received their guests near the entry to the main reception chamber. Each was formally announced by Hadley, the head butler, in his rich town-crier's voice. Hadley was decoratively clad in livery similar to that to be seen in the Royal Household: white starched ruff, a black embroidered waistcoat with gold threaded stripes fastened with gold buttons embossed with the Donnithorne crest, black breeches tied below the knee with gold buttons and a tassel, orange silk stockings and black patent leather buckled pumps.

Elizabeth cast a proprietorial glance at Edward who looked the dignified host in his midnight blue dinner suit, although, if his wife had her way, he would have worn his Colonel's full dress military uniform, complete with service ribbons, especially as the guests were to include Lord and Lady Arundel, accompanied by their son, the Honourable Charles.

He had laughed away the proposal. 'I could never compete with Hadley and, besides, the two of us might have given the impression it was a fancy dress party,' he had joked.

The Arundels arrived fashionably late. The silver-haired Lord Arundel was in his early sixties and had a relaxed dignity. Lady Arundel wore a tiara and, with each movement, it competed with a waterfall of glittering diamonds adorning her gown. The twenty-something Charles Arundel was tall, sparse and a touch gawky. He spoke with a lisp and sported a bushy, drooping moustache.

Edward shook hands with Lord Arundel. 'Delighted you could join us, my lord. And welcome your ladyship,' he added, beaming a smile in her direction.

Arundel was his usual affable self. 'Wouldn't miss one of your soirees for all the tea in China, my dear Edward.'

Elizabeth and Lady Arundel touched gloves and exchanged chaste pecks. Lady Arundel looked about. 'So ... where is your charming daughter tonight?'

'Penelope is staying with friends in the country for the weekend,' Elizabeth explained, turning to acknowledge Charles by way of bringing the son and heir into the conversation. 'I understand you have finished at Oxford, Charles.'

'Yes ma'am. At long last!' Charles responded.

Lady Arundel smiled indulgently. 'How quickly children become adults. And how might your young sister be faring, Edward?'

Edward pursed his lips in a wry smile. 'Eliza is quite the young lady these days. She will be twenty-one later this year. Hard to believe.'

'Aha, that reminds me,' said Lord Arundel. 'Your father writes me he is throwing one of your sort of parties, Edward. To mark your sister's formal coming of age. I gather we're all invited.'

'We should love to attend, but ...' Elizabeth said ruefully.

Edward completed the sentence for her. 'But the regiment might take a dim view!'

Lady Arundel turned to her son. 'It should be an interesting experience for Charles. A journey to the bottom of the world ... before he gets a proper job.'

Charles feigned hurt. 'What's wrong with just being a world traveller, Mother?'

As the Arundels moved away to greet and exchange pleasantries with other guests, Elizabeth turned to Edward. 'I just don't see Charles as being the right one for Eliza.'

Edward pretended to consider his wife's assessment. 'My darling,' he began, 'don't tell me. Tell my father!'



After pacing about his desk, James stopped at the window of his study and gazed out upon the grounds, his usual approach to dealing with awkward issues. Eventually, he turned about, exhaled, and looked across his desk to Eliza, seated on the far side. 'Firstly, you had no right, nor authority, to re-engage Mrs Humphries,' he began. 'Simply because she changed her mind. Secondly, I was left unaware of what you were up to—not that it should have made any difference to my seeking a suitable person for the position of housekeeper. Thirdly, we have been fortunate to have secured a most worthy, competent and experienced candidate in the person of Mrs Kelly.'

Eliza listened to the lecture, dejected, eyes downcast, as James pursued his case against her.

'You have treated Mrs Kelly most rudely,' said James. 'Frankly, I was ashamed. After all, you are the lady of the house. And I did expect much better from you.' James paused to let his words impact, then delivered his ultimatum. 'You should now apologise to our new housekeeper.'

Eliza looked up, in growing disbelief. 'Apologise! For what? I did not utter one word to her!'

James remained calm. 'For your actions. You failed to show respect.'

Eliza's eyes opened wide in disbelief. She protested, 'Respect must be earned, Father. The Kelly woman has only been here for five minutes!'

'You are trying my patience, Eliza. You must apologise. And it is Mrs Kelly. Not the Kelly woman!'

Eliza shook her head, as if to deflect her father's edict. 'But I don't know her! I don't even like her! And ... she is a servant!'

James had heard enough. 'All people deserve respect, whether a servant or anyone else,' he snapped. 'Mrs Kelly is most able. Skilled in staff management and domestic supervision. We are most blessed to have secured her services!'

Eliza had regained much of her composure. She decided to adopt the high ground. Quietly calm, she asked, 'How do you know all those wondrous things about her?'

James was a touch unsettled. Now it was his turn to explain. 'What on earth do you mean by such a question? Do you imagine I have not ascertained the situation?'

Eliza sensed she had found the weakness in her father's argument. 'How long have you known this woman?' she asked calmly. 'One day? Perhaps a couple of days? And as such, you are well aware of her claimed attributes?'

James was shocked, tilted off balance. It was as though the clock had been turned back and he was once again in court. Before he could muster what he considered would be an adequate response, Eliza rose from her chair. 'Now, if you will kindly excuse me, Father, I have matters to attend.'

James, still stunned by how his lecture on ill manners had been diverted, sank into his chair, his hands clasped into fists on the desk.

As Eliza emerged from the study, she came upon Vashi, who had been caught off guard by the abrupt termination of the confrontation.

'Good morning, Vashi,' she smiled sweetly. 'Had your little ear to the door again?' With that, she flounced away, leaving an abashed Vashi behind.

Vashi watched Eliza depart and a contemplative expression replaced his initial surprise at being caught eavesdropping. It appeared he had a most unlikely ally in his quest to deal with the new housekeeper.



There was now some sunshine in Eliza's life. Her Saturday meetings with George Cuthbertson provided welcome respite from the tensions at Camperdown Lodge involving the downstairs conflict between Vashi and Mrs Kelly over control of the household. The festering situation badly affected the servants, who often were unsure to whom they should answer in carrying out their duties and responsibilities. James remained effectively quarantined from the situation under his roof, aloof from the power play below stairs and preoccupied with his various business pursuits. Eliza had been unable to draw her father's attention to the situation. She realised it would have been taken as yet another example of her hostility to the appointment of Mrs Kelly.

Eliza's clandestine rendezvous with George was made possible thanks to Vicky who covered for her. Vicky had been obliged to draw a nervous, reluctant Horace into the conspiracy. Despite his misgivings, Horace had been no match for his employer's persuasive and manipulative daughter. It was a fragile situation, and both girls realised that sooner or later it was likely to be uncovered. But they pushed that to the back of their minds, swept along by the drama of the intrigue.

Eliza and George sometimes went riding. She would experience the exhilaration of feeling free of all cares, with the wind in her hair and the ground sliding away beneath her mount as they cantered over the countryside. There were also picnics by secluded bays

upstream from the harbour, and on a few occasions visits to places in the town itself which she had never imagined existed. To Eliza, George was a free spirit, a man of worldly knowledge, and it was a world of life, revelations and experiences, unhindered by protocol and restrictions—all things alien to her insulated existence behind the gates of Camperdown Lodge.



Their first outing was a ride along the banks of the Georges River, and Eliza was proud and relieved to remain firmly in the saddle. George, mindful of the lessons of history, was careful that they did not progress beyond a gentle trot.

It was mid-afternoon when they reined in the horses near a shade tree in a shallow depression, hoping for some respite from the sun. George dismounted, then reached up to steady Eliza as she slipped clear of her saddle. She slid down into his outstretched arms. They froze in a momentary embrace. George bent forward to kiss Eliza. She averted her lips, planting a playful peck on his forehead, and gave him a mischievous smile as she turned aside and clear of his arms.

George shrugged and grinned philosophically as he joined Eliza, who seated herself in the shade, leaning against the tree trunk. She was pleased with herself. She had established a relaxed closeness.

‘Well, you didn’t tumble from the saddle today,’ George said, as he stretched out on the grass beside her.

Eliza sniffed, her nose in the air. ‘Hmm. I’m starting to regret ever mentioning that other George in my life,’ she said primly.



James had been away on one of his distant journeys. As was his custom, he sent word ahead of his return, which was to be two evenings

hence. Ann Kelly had intercepted the message, which was intended for Vashi, who was expected to assemble the more urgent documents and matters for the master's attention, and alert carriageman Thomas and the rest of the household by informing the housekeeper. It was an established routine to ensure things would be in order for James's return. On this occasion, things were different.

Part of the routine was making sure that James's quarters would be readied. If the weather was cool, a bed warmer would be in place and the kitchen staff on standby to prepare a suitable meal. Ann Kelly was about to summons Angela to deliver the message to Vashi in his office when she had second thoughts. She slipped the paper into a seldom-used drawer in the morning room. Eliza was not informed either.

James arrived home late on a chilly night of wind-whipped rain. Mrs Kelly had instructed Elizabeth and Sarah at short notice to prepare a supper, and Rose and Angela were assigned to make sure the house was in order. Margaret, the cook, who was unaware of the master's imminent return, had retired early. Vashi had gone to his quarters too. The only one who had been alerted in time was Thomas, who had the carriage on standby.

Elizabeth watched as Sarah poked at the smouldering ashes in the dining room fireplace, having added some neatly cut firewood. It slowly flickered, then began to take hold, with little spurts of flame. It was a futile exercise since James had elected to take supper in his study, checking papers as he ate.

Sarah glanced at the clock beating away in the corner. 'I had better go and fetch the dishes. The master will have finished supper,' she told Elizabeth.

'Very well. Then hurry upstairs and turn down the covers—make sure all's well before he retires. And you had better hurry,' Elizabeth added.

Sarah hesitated. 'Do you think someone ought to inform Vashi that the master's arrived home?'

Elizabeth shook her head. 'That is up to the housekeeper. Besides, Vashi has gone to bed. It's none of our business, dear sister.'

As though on cue, Mrs Kelly appeared and, without ceremony, stopped by the fireplace and inspected Sarah's handiwork. 'Well, we shan't be needing that,' she said. 'It's getting late and you ladies have had rather a long day,' she added, almost sweetly. 'I'll attend to the rest.'

The two maids could scarcely believe what they were hearing and exchanged suspicious glances. Elizabeth ventured, 'I was about to get Sarah to attend to the master's quarters.'

Mrs Kelly shook her head, still smiling. 'I'll look after that. Now off you both go. Before I change my mind.'

Elizabeth took Sarah by the arm and steered her sister towards the door. When they got outside, Sarah exclaimed, 'What on earth is going on?'

Her sister shrugged. 'Ours is not to reason why. Or perhaps it should be "never look a gift horse in the mouth".' Sarah remained none the wiser.



All activity seemed to have come to an end. The servants were in their quarters, asleep in the grip of the deepening night. The light under the study door confirmed to Mrs Kelly that James was still up. It was as if a signal had been lit to encourage her own resolve.

In keeping with her status as housekeeper, Ann Kelly's quarters compared favourably with those of family and house guests in comfort and conveniences: a generous-sized bed, flickering fire in the grate of an adjacent living area, writing desk, easy chairs, bookshelves and framed landscapes on the walls. Archways led to a dressing room and a bathroom.

A dripping wet Ann Kelly stood up in the bathtub and cranked shut the trickling spigot. She reached over to grab a towel from a

side stand and began drying her body. She wrapped herself in the towel and made for the warmth of the fire. Once dry, she moved to the dressing table and dabbed her naked body with cologne. Still naked, she sat before the mirror and combed her hair until it gleamed in the lamplight. When she arose, Ann Kelly's long and lustrous hair fell about her shapely shoulders. The housekeeper had been transformed into a Rubens-like beauty.

From a drawer she picked out a silk nightgown and drew it over her head. The fabric draped her body in a shimmering embrace. Ann Kelly drew back her hair and fastened it loosely with a tortoiseshell clip, which still permitted the dark tresses to fall about her shoulders. It was a strong contrast to the housekeeper's usual severe bun. She turned one way, then the other, reacting satisfaction at what the mirror revealed.

Ann Kelly plucked a transparent shawl from a bedpost and shrugged it about her shoulders. She eased her door open and made sure the hallway was empty, then stepped out and closed the door behind her.



Glancing across to the study's grandfather clock, James decided it was time to call it a day. He pushed his papers and notes into a neat pile on the desk and shoved back his chair.

James entered his softly lit bed chamber quietly. And came to an abrupt stop. A tall, graceful woman was turning down the covers on his canopied four-poster.

Ann Kelly straightened up and turned to James. 'Oh! It's you, sir! I didn't expect you so soon!' She appeared flustered, first looking at her low-cut bodice, then folding her arms beneath her breasts in a provocative gesture, which had the effect of further accentuating her cleavage.

'My God! Mrs Kelly!' James blurted as he recognised the unexpected presence in his bed chamber.

'The staff retired earlier, sir,' she said in a soft voice. 'I am about to turn in myself. After I attend to your ... needs.'

James nodded, unable to drag his eyes away.

Ann Kelly smiled, looked directly into his eyes. 'I believe you will find everything is satisfactory,' she said quietly.

James nodded, found his voice. 'Thank you. Everything looks, er, fine,' he fumbled.

'So, if there is nothing else you require?' Ann Kelly said.

She began to take her leave, still holding James in her gaze. She brushed against him as she moved towards the door. In the soft lamplight her silk nightgown took on a luminescence that emphasised the shape of her body. She looked more like a goddess than a housekeeper. She hesitated at the doorway, looked back to a transfixed James. 'If there is nothing else, sir, then it is time I went to bed.'

'There is one thing, Mrs Kelly,' James began, sensing the incongruity of his formality.

With a hand on the doorknob, and James still locked into her unwavering gaze, Ann Kelly asked, 'And what might that be, sir?'

Imagine, there had been such a desirable treasure under his own roof, James told himself. The fact he employed her husband in distant Victoria became irrelevant.

James crossed to the door, ran a hand behind Ann Kelly's arched neck and released the clasp that held her hair. She reminded him of the sturdy country girls of his first encounters, the feverish and early ejaculative bondings in the days of his youth in Cornwall. These memories added to James's sense of excitement. He could smell Ann Kelly's perfume. She parted her moist lips, though no words were spoken. None necessary. 'Turn down the lamps, please, Mrs Kelly,'

'The name is Ann,' she said, barely above a whisper.

He nodded. 'Then turn down the lamps, please. Ann.'

Chapter Eight

Vashi was seated at his desk. There came a brief, forceful rap on the door. Before he could respond, the door opened and Mrs Kelly strode in. She glanced about, taking in the confined quarters then, without further ado, seated herself opposite Vashi.

Vashi, annoyed by the abrupt intrusion, pushed aside some papers. 'You want to see me,' he said brusquely.

Without wasting time on pleasantries, Ann Kelly got straight down to business. 'Yes, Mr Vashi. It concerns my authority to manage the household without hindrance or obstruction.'

Vashi was guarded. 'I'm afraid I don't understand. Nobody is hindering or obstructing you in your duties, Mrs Kelly.'

Ann Kelly was unimpressed. 'Why, then, am I supposed to refer all matters to you?'

Vashi shrugged. 'It's simple really. The household has rules and procedures. And they are long standing. That is how good order is established, as I am sure you would understand.'

Ann Kelly smiled, though not with her eyes. 'No, Mr Vashi. It is you who does not understand. We live in a world of change. And for this household, it will be for the better.'

Vashi leaned back in his chair and clasped his hands together by their fingertips. 'Change is one thing. Ignoring procedures, undermining order and creating confusion and uncertainty are another.'

With raised eyebrows Ann Kelly feigned surprise. 'What on earth are you talking about?'

Vashi pursed his lips, tried to maintain an authoritative calm. 'I'm pleased to enlighten you,' he began. 'For example, let's take a recent example of a breakdown in good order. As you should be aware, I should be told of the master's movements. Especially when he is returning after an absence. Yet earlier this week, on your watch, this did not occur.'

Ann Kelly looked exasperated. 'The notice of the master's expected arrival on Tuesday evening went astray. But the maids and I had not retired so everything was taken care of.'

Vashi, still smarting at being kept in the dark, was stirred to anger. 'How was it that you, Mrs Kelly, were aware when the master was returning? And were able to brief staff, alert Thomas, when the notification was supposedly lost?'

'Not lost. Gone astray,' snapped Ann Kelly. 'Fortunately, it was located in time to organise matters.' She rose. 'I am too busy to concern myself with trivialities. If you have any complaints involving myself, then refer them to your master.'

As she walked to the door, Vashi demanded, 'Return to your seat. I am not finished!'

From the doorway Ann Kelly said, without looking back, 'But I am!'

Long after the door had been banged shut, Vashi sat digesting and evaluating what had been said, as well as everything that had not been said. He thought about the housekeeper's comments and demeanor. Why did she refer to Mr Donnithorne as his master? Was he not also her master? And she had virtually invited him to complain about her. Why was Ann Kelly so sure of herself?



Eliza passed the gates of Mont Eagle House as night settled upon Newtown. She had spent the day with George Cuthbertson. Distant thunder and the occasional flicker of lightning announced the approach of a coming storm as she hastened towards neighbouring Camperdown Lodge. Eliza was later than usual and so she entered the house by the service entry in the hope of not being discovered. As she was making her way past the deserted kitchen and through the main living room, she came upon Sarah.

‘Oh, there you are, Miss Eliza,’ said the maidservant, ‘we were becoming concerned.’

Eliza paused. She slipped off her shawl and gave it a shake. Sarah added, ‘I was going to get Elizabeth to go to Mont Eagle House. We have been holding supper.’

Eliza removed her bonnet and walked towards the stairs. Without looking back she announced, ‘I’ll take supper in my room.’

‘That’s what the Master did,’ Sarah called after her. Her voice trailed off as Eliza was lost to sight. Sarah shook her head. ‘Must be something in the air tonight,’ she murmured and turned to return to the kitchen. Vashi was standing in her way. ‘Oooh! You startled me!’

Vashi looked beyond her to the stairs. ‘Hmm. Later and later,’ he said, glancing to the clock stand.

Eliza disliked Sydney’s violent seasonal thunderstorms, especially at night when nature’s brass drums, moaning woodwinds that snared at downpipes and chimneys and clashing of cymbals suggested a Dante-like orchestra that shook the Lodge and struck fear into her heart.

She lay in bed, sleep eluding her, as the storm picked up in fury and intensity. Fingers of lightning lit up the room, each object briefly revealed in an alien hue that changed the character of normally friendly and familiar surroundings. Fingers of rain streamed down the window panes, reminding her it was only the thin, fragile glass that separated her from the tempest raging outside.

Eliza recalled what it had been like when she was a small girl, when she would flee to the security of her father's bed, taking comfort in his masculine scent of tobacco and sometimes whisky, as his strong arms would enfold her, and all would be safe in her world.

Another drum roll of thunder shook the Lodge. Outside, a lightning flash revealed a tree near the window, thrashing wildly in the rain-laced wind. A few moments later Eliza heard a creaking, wood-splitting crack as a branch was torn free. It slammed against the window, smashing the glass.

Eliza sat bolt upright and screamed as glass shards cascaded across the room, her terror increased by the roar beyond the wounded window. She scrambled out of bed to seek refuge in her father's quarters, her heart bumping beneath her thin cotton nightdress.

The chambers and passageways she ran through were alternatively light and dark, creating a kaleidoscopic effect as she hurried past ancestral family portraits which assumed menace in the coloured hues cast by the stained glass of skylights. It was a barefoot journey of implied danger and menace.

When at last Eliza reached the door to her father's quarters, she tried the door. It was unlocked so she turned the knob and slipped inside.

The lamps had been turned low and the fingers of light cast by the storm revealed flashes of the interior. Eliza stopped, not believing the sight before her.

Her father was not alone. He was naked and astride a dark-haired woman pushed into a tangle of bedsheets. Her legs rose to grip James's torso. The woman moaned in ecstasy as lightning flashed. It was enough to reveal the identity of the woman in her father's bed. The detested Ann Kelly.

Eliza backed to the doorway, in a confusion of revulsion and fascination. Unsteady and sobbing, she ran back to her bedroom.



The storm passed. In the cold light of dawn, Eliza resolved to wreak revenge upon Ann Kelly—now the other woman in her life, who threatened to steal her father's love, to turn her world upside down.

Eliza deliberately took her breakfast late, not wishing to be confronted by her father. She was reasonably certain that her presence in the bed chamber had not been noticed during the storm. She hurried through her toast and tea, and hastened back to the privacy of her quarters.

She sat down at her writing desk. She was about to compose what was probably the most difficult letter she had ever been obliged to pen, although much of what she wanted to commit to paper had formed in her mind.

The fact that this was something she could not bring herself to confide in her dearest friend made it all the more daunting. Eliza had agonised over telling Vicky, but the shame involved was just too much to share. It brought home to her that no matter how special and close the friendship, the adage about blood being thicker than water seemed to hold true in times of acute family crises.

Then she took a deep breath, gathered herself, and took up the pen.

Dear Mr Kelly,

It is with some trepidation that I write to you in the following terms, but upon much consideration and great soul-searching, I believe that there are matters of importance that you ought to be acquainted with.

She read through the opening passage. Yes, that would do, she told herself. Now for the real challenge.

Eliza again dipped the pen into the silver-and-ivory inkwell, a birthday gift from her father. An hour later it was done. There was

a pile of crumpled paper at Eliza's feet beneath the desk. She had gone through the laborious process of writing a passage, rejecting, correcting then rewriting, the letter edging forward, word by word, sentence by sentence, until at last she was satisfied that it was as good as she could make it.

As she hurried downstairs and made for the kitchen, Eliza felt a load lifted from her. She entrusted her letter to Elizabeth and Sarah. 'I see I'm in time for the mail,' she said. 'Please make sure this one goes,' she added, handing the envelope to Elizabeth.

Elizabeth glanced up from her sorting. 'Leave it here. Sarah will be off to the post office shortly, Miss Eliza.'

Eliza delicately placed her letter on the table, as if reluctant to commit it to the system. Elizabeth scooped it up and placed it on top of the pile.

Returning to her room, she lay flat on her bed and absently studied the patterned ceiling. She was beginning to doubt whether she might have done the right thing. She didn't know how William Kelly might react upon learning of his wife's infidelity.

Try as she might, Eliza could not dismiss a little voice that whispered there was still time to change her mind and retrieve the letter; another voice told her that the die was cast and it was the only way to rid herself of the ambitious, meddlesome Ann Kelly, and safeguard the special relationship with her father.

Eliza rolled off the bed and knelt down to retrieve the crumpled earlier drafts of the letter. Methodically she ripped each into confetti so that no prying eyes would ever decipher what she had committed to writing. She stuffed the scraps into the fireplace.



Downstairs Elizabeth was handing over the mail to Sarah when Vashi bustled into the room, pressing closed the flaps of a buff-coloured

envelope which had been freshly sealed with a blob of red wax that had not yet quite set. 'Sarah is about to leave for the post,' Elizabeth said.

Vashi nodded curtly, his haste and demeanour emphasising the importance of his communication. Before handing over his letter he consulted his fob watch, looked at Sarah and frowned, clearly doubting the girl's ability to meet a deadline. He was about to hand over the envelope when his eye was attracted by a letter on the top of the pile Sarah was holding. There was something familiar about the fine, spidery handwriting. He reached out and relieved the maid of the bundle. 'I had better attend to these. I have some urgent business that will take me by the post office,' he announced. He hurried from the kitchen, leaving the Bailey sisters to exchange bewildered looks.



Eliza came to a decision. She sat upright on the edge of her bed and eyed the torn notepaper in the grate. She knew she could not go through with it. The embarrassment and shame that her deed might cause now appalled her. There had to be another way to be rid of Ann Kelly, although she was not sure just what that might be. But she had to retrieve the letter. She made for the door. There was no time to lose.

Eliza hurried into the kitchen for the second time that morning. She was relieved to see Sarah. 'Thank goodness you are still here,' she exclaimed.

'Is there something you need, Miss?'

Eliza smiled. 'Nothing is wrong. It's just that I need my letter back.'

Sarah shrugged. 'Oh. The mail is gone.'

Eliza's heart skipped a beat. She fought back a wave of panic and tried to steady her voice. 'I don't understand. Why are you here then?' she asked Sarah.

Elizabeth chipped in, 'Actually, Miss, Mr Vashi volunteered to take the mail.'

Eliza felt faint. 'What! Vashi! You mean he has my letter?'

Sarah glanced at the wall clock. 'He was in a rush. He left twenty minutes ago. He'll be at the post office by now, I imagine.'

In disbelief, Eliza turned and hurried from the kitchen. She prayed that Vashi hadn't noticed her letter among the usual Friday post.

Whatever, that still left her with the problem of how William Kelly would react to the news about his wife. Eliza's life seemed to be falling apart.



Although getting to Lane Cove River involved crossing to the northern shore of Sydney harbour by ferry and then a carriage ride to the river's upper reaches, it had become Eliza and George's favourite place, a tranquil, private setting for their Saturdays together. The tree-lined stream with its grassy banks and patches of reeds could well have been in England, except that the ridges which flanked much of the waterway's meandering course were uncultivated and remained much as it was before European settlers.

George was in his shirtsleeves, his jacket folded across a picnic basket. He plied away at the oars of a small skiff. Eliza, in the stern, wore a broad-brimmed hat with long ribbons. Her skirt was spread delicately over her seat and one hand trailed in the water.

George took a break from the oars, catching his breath. 'You're rather pensive today,' he told Eliza, who had been quiet since they had rowed away from a small downstream boatshed where they had hired the little wooden boat.

'I have some things on my mind,' Eliza said, a touch primly.

George considered a moment. 'Do you want to tell me?'

She shook her head. 'Not really. It's just, um, family matters.'

'Well, then,' he said, 'I suppose I had better get back to work.' He took up the oars and set the skiff back on course. George was becoming accustomed to matters involving Eliza's life at Camperdown Lodge coming between them. 'Just tell me when you see a likely spot.'

Eliza broke her silence, albeit briefly. 'Just keep rowing. I will tell you when.' Their attention was captured by the splashing and creaking of another rowboat, which grew out of the distance astern. Soon, it surged alongside, with a young man and a woman on board. Working vigorously at his oars, the man threw a cheeky grin at George as he put on more pace. It was a challenge that was not lost on George, who immediately increased his strokes.

The boats rocked and strained in response to the call for more speed. Eliza and the woman in the challenger, exchanged waves, joining into the spirit of the contest. The oars rose and fell, and sunlight glinted on the splashing water. Despite George's best efforts, the challenger drew steadily ahead. Encouraged by the excitement, he tried to crank up his strokes. A missed stroke, however, caused an oar to skid across the surface, scooping up a heavy airborne spray. Eliza took most of the flying water, which drenched her hat, face and shoulders.

Eliza squealed in part surprise and part amusement. George gave up on the oars and broke into a broad grin. The rival couple laughed in delight, their victorious boat drawing steadily into the distance.



The rowboat was nosed into the reeds by the bank. Eliza's hat was drying on the grass. Secure in a secluded spot among sheltering trees, Eliza and George sprawled on the grass. Beside them was an open basket and the remains of a picnic lunch.

George leaned closer to Eliza to dab at a trickle of water from her damp hair. 'I think you'll survive,' he told her gently.

Eliza smiled. 'I'm sure I will,' she responded and reached out to

touch George's hand. He bent closer. Their lips were inches apart. Ever so slowly, their lips met.

At first it was brushing tentative contact. It soon grew into a soft kiss. The kiss became more urgent. Eliza reached out to embrace George. He responded by enfolding her into his arms as they lay on the grass. They became lost in hunger for each other. They clawed at each other's clothing, abandoning all restraint. Time seemed to stand still, everything else in the world had stopped, except their love making.

Eliza's hat remained on the grass, now thoroughly dried by the afternoon sun, which had begun to slip behind the trees on the ridge across the river. The small boat remained by the bank waiting for its occupants. In the distance came the squawk of some ducks, then the flapping of their wings.



It was growing well into the evening when Mrs Kelly came upon Elizabeth. She was alone, bustling about, plumping cushions, straightening chairs, removing flowers from vases. Ann Kelly stood for a few moments, taking in the activity, then glanced up to the clock, 'Well, you seem to be working late,' she announced, startling Elizabeth, who had not noticed the housekeeper's arrival. Mrs Kelly sniffed at the air, turned towards the passage that led to the kitchen. 'Is that food I can smell?'

Elizabeth nodded. 'Just keeping some supper on,' she said, wary of the housekeeper's appearance—Saturday evenings were her nights off if there were no formal dinners or house guests in residence.

Mrs Kelly was suspicious. 'And who is the supper for?' she probed.

Elizabeth shrugged, tried to sound matter-of-fact. 'Oh, just in case it might be needed.'

Mrs Kelly glanced at the clock again. She turned back to Elizabeth. 'Has Miss Eliza returned?'

'I don't believe so. She is probably with Miss Vicky.' She was not going to say that she had already despatched Sarah to Mont Eagle House to check if Eliza was there. 'Sometimes Miss Eliza takes supper with Vicky,' she lied, adding, 'they seem to have much in common.'

Sarah appeared in the doorway behind Mrs Kelly and came to a stop. Elizabeth's heart skipped a few beats. Sarah shook her head and was about to announce there was no sign of Miss Eliza at the neighbouring household, when she read the anguished message on her sister's face.

Mrs Kelly swung about to confront a startled Sarah. 'And what might you be supposed to be doing?' she demanded.

Elizabeth placed a finger to her lips to signal to her sister not to mention going to Mont Eagle House. Sarah groped for something to say.

'I asked you a simple question. Just what are you doing at this hour?' the housekeeper snapped.

Sarah smiled nervously. 'I, er, I wanted to see if Elizabeth needed any assistance,' she managed lamely.

Mrs Kelly wheeled back to Elizabeth. She knew the Baileys were lying. Just what were they covering up? Ann Kelly turned and took her leave. The sisters knew that this would not be the end of it.

King Street was dimly lit by gaslight. A hansom cab appeared out of the gloom and creaked to a stop near the gates of Mont Eagle House.

George Cuthbertson alighted, turned and extended an arm to assist Eliza from the carriage. Eliza glanced nervously about, aware of the late hour. George, reading her thoughts, also scanned the street. 'Looks like the coast is clear,' he smiled, trying to reassure Eliza. They shared a hurried embrace. When George sought to prolong it, Eliza pulled away. 'Please, I must be going,' she told him.

George again glanced about. 'Of course. I'll look out for you.' With another quick kiss, Eliza hurried away on the short walk to

Camperdown Lodge. George watched her enter and become lost to view. Satisfied all was well, he boarded the cab and called to the driver, 'Back to the city.'

The hansom creaked forward to execute a U-turn, to clip-clop away into the night. Across the street opposite the entrance gates of Mont Eagle House, a figure stood in a patch of shadows cast by a roadside tree.

Mrs Kelly watched the carriage disappearing into the feeble light cast by the flickering street lamps. A triumphant smile slowly developed as she looked back to Camperdown Lodge.



For the next few days James was involved in problems arising from his recent investment at Watson's Bay, later one of Sydney's most exclusive suburbs. His efforts to subdivide the sloping hillside for housing had been frustrated by water runoff from the commanding ridge which separated the harbour from the ocean cliffs beyond. Attempts to sort out the problems had involved him in days on site with engineers and government officials, with follow-up meetings with architects and others which would extend into the night. The challenges of Watson's Bay would not be resolved by the time he died.

As a result of his preoccupations, James's did not spend a night with Ann Kelly until well into the week. The housekeeper let herself into his bedroom, closing the door quietly behind her. James went over to her but Ann Kelly pulled back.

'Ann, is anything wrong?' he asked in bewilderment.

'That's for you to decide, James,' she said.

'There obviously does appear to be a problem,' he said, assuming it might be about their relationship.

Ann Kelly shook her head. 'Not between us. It's something else. Something you ought to know.'

James shrugged, becoming impatient. 'What are you talking about, Ann?'

She heaved a deep sigh, as if what needed to be said would be said reluctantly. 'James, my dearest. It concerns your daughter.'

Chapter Nine

It was after 11 PM and Vashi, who was working on papers in his office, was the first to hear the sound of a cart rattling up the driveway. He looked at his fob watch. Nobody was expected at such a late hour. Vashi sensed trouble. In his experience, bad news usually came unannounced and with the night.

Margaret and Sarah were closing the kitchen and doing some last-minute tidying up when they heard the stomping of boots, followed by hammering on the front doors. There was an urgency in the banging that was unsettling. Elizabeth hurried down the stairs. Her initial surprise was giving way to indignation. Whoever it was was disturbing the entire household, including the master, and that would never do. She was inwardly admonishing the unknown visitor as she swept by the alarmed Margaret and Sarah and unbolted the doors.

'Open up!' a man's voice yelled from the porch.

Vashi drew aside his office curtains and peered into the night. He could just glimpse two horses in harness tethered to the corner of the front wing. He let the curtains fall into place. A smile lit his swarthy face and he absently rubbed his hands together. If his guess was right, things could well be looking up for him.

Elizabeth drew open the doors and was confronted by the florid, unshaven William Kelly. Each one of the rough miles from far-off Victoria showed.

'Where are they?' he demanded loudly, peering beyond Sarah

into the entrance hall. Fearful that the man might try to force his way in, Elizabeth moved to block his passage.

'Whoever you are, what is your business at this late hour?' Elizabeth demanded, fixing him in a steely gaze.

'I be William Kelly! And I want justice!' he shouted.

Sarah, fearful for the safety of her sister, was galvanised to action at the sound of Kelly's raised voice. She hurried to join Elizabeth by the door.

'It's late, Mr Kelly,' Elizabeth told him. 'If you have any business here then I suggest you make an appointment.'

Kelly was not to be put off. 'I don't need any appointment, I want justice. Here and now!' he shouted. 'Summon your master!'

Sarah shot a frantic glance at her sister, her legs beginning to shake. She marvelled at Elizabeth, who was not flinching from the menacing man. Kelly looked as if he was going to force entry. He was within inches of the diminutive Elizabeth, towering above her. She could detect his stale body odour and the sour smell of his breath.

'I have no intention of disturbing the master at this hour, Mr Kelly. You will need to come back tomorrow,' she said, ignoring his rage, and locking his bloodshot eyes into her challenging gaze. Her coolness had a brief steadying effect.

'I have no quarrel with you, young lady. It's others I has business with,' he said in a menacing tone. 'I've come too far to be turned away now!' William Kelly made to step inside.

'No!' Elizabeth cried, stepping to block him, watched by Sarah who was now incapable of any movement. As Elizabeth grabbed at Kelly's coatsleeves, for the first time ever she wished that Vashi was at hand. Then another voice called out.

'Stop right where you are, Mr Kelly!' James Donnithorne's voice had an immediate effect. The trio at the door froze.

James stood in the soft lamplight at the foot of the stairs, looking calm and dignified in his silk smoking jacket. Kelly was momentarily

unsure of himself, and blinked owlshly at the sight of James, who was impressive and every bit as tall as himself. James first addressed the Bailey sisters. 'Elizabeth and Sarah, you are excused. And you, too,' he called to Margaret.

James watched them leave. Kelly opened his mouth to speak. James held up his hand for silence. When satisfied they were alone, he motioned to his farm manager. 'Not a word, Mr Kelly,' he said. 'We can talk in the study.'

The entire household was awake. Eliza peered through the door of her bedroom as the Bailey sisters made for their rooms, lost in low conversation about the scene downstairs. She caught the name Kelly.

Eliza eased the door closed, feeling a shiver of trepidation. She sat nervously on the edge of the bed.

Ann Kelly had recognised the voice. The angry shouting had unleashed fear and apprehension in her. She sank onto a chair and stared at the closed door, wondering whether William would burst in. For the first time in many months she was unsure what to do. When the normally compliant William lost control she knew it could mean violent and dangerous behaviour. She dreaded the fury of her cuckolded husband, now venting his anger downstairs. Ann knew this was one of the times when events assumed their own unswerving inevitability. She remained on the chair, her mouth dry, the beat of her heart in her ears.

Vashi edged up to the study door and placed an ear to a wooden panel. William Kelly dominated the rise and fall of the conversation. By contrast, James's voice was quiet and measured. Vashi heard enough to satisfy himself that the letter to St Agnes had indeed borne fruit. He went back to his office and kept the door open, not so much to eavesdrop as to know if required to ensure his master's safety. This had been his personally assigned priority since being appointed as assistant to the judge in the East India Company days.

William Kelly ran out of steam at last and James knew he had to settle the issue, and hopefully placate the irate night visitor. 'I trust, Mr Kelly, that the situation has been clarified,' he began quietly, eyeing Kelly, who was slumped in his chair, the pent-up emotions and long journey from St Agnes Station taking its toll.

Kelly did not reply. He was still digesting James's earlier remarks. James began to wind up his summation—it was as classic a summing up as he had ever been obliged to make in his years on the bench. He paused again to peruse the letter Kelly had produced, more as theatrical gesture than to acquaint himself of its contents.

'I can well understand why this should upset you,' he said, placing the piece of paper aside. 'This is a malicious, vindictive and hurtful piece of mischief. It clearly sets out to cause hurt and trouble. The person responsible will be dealt with accordingly.'

Kelly was wary. 'Are you saying it's not true? What it says about you and my wife?'

James shrugged, effecting indulgent impatience. 'I am surprised you could accept the veracity of such a libelous document.'

Kelly was confused by the response. 'Eh?'

James warmed to his explanation. 'It's simple, Mr Kelly. Your wife assumed the role of housekeeper to introduce changes, to make improvements, and introduce order and efficiency. Her presence has affected everyone in the house. This outrageous attack is not so much on me. It is really aimed at your good wife. By someone with an agenda.'

Kelly remained uncertain. 'Why would anyone want to do that?'

James smiled. 'Ah, a pertinent question, Mr Kelly. We must assume some people might resent a regime of change. In fact, they may feel threatened by it.'

Kelly replied slowly, digesting James's explanation. 'Yes, I think I see what you mean ...'

It was time to play the ace card. 'I should, however, admit to one thing, Mr Kelly,' James said.

Kelly was curious, a touch uncertain. 'And what might that be?'

James now adopted a conspiratorial tone. 'I acted incorrectly in appointing your good wife as housekeeper in such haste. I have always believed that a woman's place is by her husband's side. But I needed a replacement and I now see it was rather selfish on my part.' James spread his hands and inclined his head. 'Camperdown Lodge's loss will be your gain.'

Kelly was again confused. 'My gain, sir?'

'Indeed. You should welcome your wife's support in running a station like St Agnes. It is clear that is where she is most needed.' James paused for effect. 'Naturally, in view of Mrs Kelly's continuing responsibilities, she will remain on full salary. As though still a housekeeper.'

Kelly was now calmed and reassured. He sat quietly, a touch awestruck at such a personal encounter with his master. He realised the enormity of his accusation, and his foolishness at being taken in by the offending letter.

James rose and rubbed his hands together. 'I believe it's time for a warming dram,' he announced brightly. 'What would you like? Whisky? Brandy. Or perhaps rum?'

Kelly was overwhelmed, though managed, 'Brandy, er, will be fine, thank you, sir.'

James crossed to a sideboard and choose two crystal goblets and a ball-shaped bottle of cognac. He spoke as he poured. 'I will have Thomas help you bed down your horses. You can make yourself comfortable tonight in the stablehands' quarters.' He passed a glass to Kelly, adding, 'I shall inform Mrs Kelly of the arrangements in the morning. And once she has packed, you will be free to leave.'

James raised his glass. 'Here's to a safe journey for you both.'

They clinked glasses. James smiled warmly. Kelly blinked, emotionally overwhelmed and close to tears at the kindness and understanding of his master.



All morning an anxious Eliza awaited the summons she was certain would come, though her agony would last until mid-afternoon, when the carriage bearing William and Ann Kelly crunched away down the gravel driveway, watched by a stunned household.

Vashi saw the vehicle turn into King Street. It would be the last time, he told himself with grim satisfaction, that he would set eyes on Ann Kelly in the precincts of Camperdown Lodge.

Having been obliged to tell Ann Kelly that she should return to her husband and St Agnes Station, James was conspicuous by his absence at the departure. He had another, related, issue to deal with.

Eliza settled uneasily onto the chair in the study. With an audible sigh, her father turned to his daughter. Eliza's eyes flickered to meet his steady gaze, awaiting the storm.

James did not mince words. 'You should be ashamed of yourself!' he began. 'You have acted in a deceitful, disloyal manner. Acting behind my back, evidently bent on causing me pain and shame and ignoring the consequences!'

'I'm sorry, Papa,' said a badly shaken Eliza.

James shook his head, in rising anger. 'You're sorry? Sorry? Is that all you can say?'

Eliza licked at her dry lips. 'I really am sorry. I did try to stop it. I truly did. But it was too late.'

James was incredulous. 'What! You say you have tried to stop this deceitful relationship? Has this person taken complete control of you?'

The penny dropped. Her father was talking about George. Not the letter. What was going on?

'Well?' he prompted. 'The cat got your tongue?'

Eliza finally managed, 'George is a decent and respectable person. I met him at the church.'

'So, it's George! And who and what might this person be?'

'His name is George Cuthbertson,' she began nervously. 'He's a reputable man, and gainfully employed,' she added, aware of the feeble nature of her response. But what else could she say?

'Reputable perhaps,' James responded. 'But, I have no doubt, certainly not suitable! And at what, is he supposedly gainfully employed?'

'George is ... is a shipping clerk.'

James was stunned. 'A shipping clerk!' he shouted, implying that it might well be similar to being a felon or some other undesirable member of the community. 'Do you imagine you have been raised, educated and groomed within a family and social environment such as ours to ... to marry a clerk?'

'A shipping clerk, Papa,' Eliza ventured and a touch primly.

James shook his head in continued disbelief. 'Whatever. But I forbid this association. You are not to be permitted to keep seeing him. It is out of the question!'

Eliza was becoming calm again. Now that her relationship with George was in the open, in her mind, it felt as now the air had been cleared and she had shed the burden of continuing deceit.

'There is something you should know. George and I have become fond of each other,' she said quietly.

James was now thunderstruck, fearful of what his daughter might reveal next. 'Fond! Fond! Just how long have you been seeing this, er, this ... ?'

'It's George, Papa,' Eliza elaborated. 'And I have known him long enough to know that I love him.'

James shook his head in disbelief. 'Love? Love? Have you taken leave of your senses?'

Eliza took a deep breath. She decided it was time to fight back, well aware that her father still treated her as a child.

'I will shortly be coming of age. I should be allowed to decide who I want to share my life with,' she announced.

James pursed his lips, trying to come to terms with Eliza's defiance. He decided to try another tack. 'Yes, you will be of age. And you might be interested to know that I have planned a party for you. Your brother Edward, Elizabeth and cousin Penelope, among others, have been invited.' He paused to let the significance of the news sink in. Eliza remained silent.

'Lord and Lady Arundel have confirmed their attendance,' he continued, 'with their son Charles. A fine young man with an impeccable background.'

Eliza inclined her head. 'Thank you, Papa. It will be nice to see family and friends again.'

James, not entirely satisfied by Eliza's lukewarm response, pushed ahead, implying enthusiasm. 'I am pleased that you see it that way. However, having said that I want you to understand that this George chap will never be permitted to set foot in Camperdown Lodge. Never!'

Eliza rose to her feet. 'Then there is nothing more to discuss. Now, if you would kindly excuse me.'

Shaken by his daughter's calm, noncommittal demeanour, James stood and watched Eliza's departure. He felt a weariness overtake him. The confrontation with William Kelly, convincing Ann to accept the arrangement for her departure, the news that his only daughter was secretly in a relationship—it was almost too much to contend with at the one time. He sank into his leather chair, feeling each year of his seven decades on the planet.

Eliza decided to return to her quarters, confused that there had been no mention of her letter, which had clearly been the reason for William Kelly's appearance the night before. She was about to climb the rear stairs when Vashi appeared from his office. It seemed to Eliza he had been waiting for her following the meeting with her father.

Casting about, as if ensuring they were alone, he called to her, 'A word, Miss Eliza.'

Eliza was wary of his conspiratorial demeanor. 'What it it?'

Vashi smiled, reached into his jacket and withdrew an envelope. 'I, er, believe this is yours,' he said, holding it out for her acceptance.

Bewildered, Eliza accepted the envelope. It looked familiar. 'Why, this is my letter!' she exclaimed. 'Just what are you ...'

Vashi cut her short. 'Alas. One cannot always rely upon the mail service these days.'

Eliza shook her head, suspicious of what Vashi was up to and confused that he had her letter. 'I don't understand,' she began. 'How do you have this?'

Vashi, still smiling, spread his hands and crooked his head. 'I should have imagined that you would be quite pleased to learn that it is in nobody else's hands.'

Eliza studied the envelope which bore her distinctive handwriting, as if it could respond to her dilemma.

Vashi watched her closely, relishing the situation. He decided it was time to enlighten her. 'How shall I put it? Yes. Your communication to Mr Kelly and the rather graphic revelations it contained was, in essence, conveyed to him. However, it was done with a touch more discretion. Perhaps, a more apt word might well be, er, anonymously.'

Eliza looked at the smiling Vashi. She noted it was more a triumphant smile than anything else.

Vashi continued, 'Rarely do we share a common interest, Miss Eliza. But this issue was, I submit, the exception.'

Eliza held up the envelope for closer inspection. It was empty. 'There's nothing in here. Where is my letter?'

Vashi substituted his smile for an appearance of assumed concern. 'You must agree that the contents were incriminating. So I have made sure it has been locked away. From prying eyes. For safe keeping.'

Eliza tried to grasp Vashi's real message.

He was delighted by her bewilderment. 'It has been filed away—under F. I., Miss Eliza,' he added, to fuel her confusion.

Eliza managed, 'Under F. I.?'

'Yes, Miss Eliza. F. I.—future insurance.' He bowed and took his leave.



Rain was slanting down across Sydney on Saturday. Eliza and George elected to stay indoors, which suited Eliza because she wanted to be somewhere quiet so she could tell George about the recent developments concerning their relationship. His lodgings at 103 Clyde Street in The Rocks consisted of two rooms and a small bathroom on the first floor of a stone terrace building. The narrow street was set back and climbed up from George Street, the main thoroughfare. The accommodation was spartan though comfortable, and was enhanced by a verandah overlooking the cobbled street.

George heard Eliza out in silence. Eliza sat on a cane chair and awaited his reaction.

'So ... your father knows about us,' he said finally.

Eliza shrugged. 'It's best, I suppose. He had to be told, sooner or later.'

'And, I gather, I am banned ...' George added quietly.

Eliza rose and placed her arms about his shoulders. She looked into George's eyes, sensing his hurt. 'It's just for now, George dearest. Give Papa time to get used to the idea.'

George was not reassured. 'This big party he is planning is to get your mind off me, I suppose.'

Eliza shook her head. 'He started organising it some time ago. So it's not what you think.'

'Perhaps,' he responded, a touch churlishly, 'though the timing seems convenient.'

Eliza sought to reassure him. 'A coming-of-age party is a family

tradition. It has no bearing on our relationship. It's just family members and some old friends, most of them Papa's.'

George disentangled himself from her embrace. 'Except, I'm not to be on the guest list.'

Eliza took hold of his arms. 'Please, don't let this spoil things,' she pleaded. 'Papa knows I love you. We'll continue to see each other.'

George inclined his head, then clasped Eliza in a tight embrace. 'Eliza, my darling ... now that we have found each other,' he breathed softly into her ear, 'I know I could never live without you.'

Eliza looked up and placed a finger to his lips. 'Shush. Don't you understand? You are now stuck with me. Whether you like it or not.'

Outside the rain continued to beat down in the narrow Clyde Street.



James had given much thought to the possible identity of William Kelly's informer. He had a short list of potential suspects, although as he considered them in turn, he would come upon something which tended to discount them.

Firstly, the letter produced had been writing in a rounded script. Even though he was well aware of Eliza's resentment of Mrs Kelly, it was nothing like her handwriting. His daughter was also the person who was closest to him, and the values of family and loyalty were ingrained into her character and ideals. They shared the grief of losing a wife and mother and Eliza's sisters.

James acknowledged that Vashi would most likely have viewed Ann Kelly as some sort of competitor within the household. However, her area of responsibility was the household's domestic needs. Vashi was his business manager, concerned with his widely spread business interests and administrative requirements. James knew that Vashi could be abrasive at times, but his many years of

loyalty and his willingness to undertake any task asked of him tended to mitigate against involvement. And, of course, Vashi always wrote in a handsome copperplate script. James had funded Vashi's education as a boy and had brought him into the household and its business interests as a young man. To James, the relationship was special for many reasons.

There was little doubt that Margaret would have had her reasons to resent the interference of Ann Kelly, who tended to issue a constant stream of instructions about culinary procedures, food and liquor requirements, and managing the kitchen and its scullery staff. But it was obviously impossible for the cook to have been responsible for the letter. If matters had become too much for her to tolerate, most likely she would have followed Mrs Humphries's example and resigned.

Finally, the maids Elizabeth and Sarah were clearly dedicated to attending to Eliza's needs, having been with her since the Donnithornes' arrival in Sydney. Nothing would have been achieved by causing conflict between their mistress and her father, James concluded.

The more James thought about it, the more difficult it was to identify the likely culprit. It did not bear thinking about.

James promised himself he would learn the answer. In the meantime, he needed to face other pressing problems. High on the list was dealing with his daughter's infatuation with George Cuthbertson, the shipping clerk who had cast some sort of spell over the most important person in his life.

Chapter Ten

It was an established custom for James and Malcolm Sedgewick to meet at the Imperial Club on Bridge Street on the third Wednesday of the month, provided that James was not out of town and Dr Sedgewick not involved with some medical issue.

The Imperial Club was a typical example of an exclusive gentlemen's retreat for members seeking to escape from business or domestic issues, and perhaps the demands of a determined spouse. However, it was also an ideal place to discuss commercial matters over a fine brandy or double-malted Scotch. It was also a place where members could sink into padded leather chairs to read the *Sydney Morning Herald* or a three-month-old *Times* from London, and various European-sourced satirical and finance and business publications.

The club was modelled on similar establishments in London and in all the colonies. The sombre-hued walls were clad with paintings of landscapes and horses, occasional portraits and prints of ships and hunting. The lighting was subdued and so was the conversation.

James and Malcolm watched in silence while their waiter poured two shots of Scotch from a crystal decanter. 'Will that be all for now, gentlemen?' he asked.

'Yes, that is all for now,' James replied, nodding for the waiter to take his leave. They raised their glasses and took first tentative sips.

'Tell me,' asked Sedgewick, replacing his glass on the small polished table, 'how are things progressing for the coming-of-age affair?'

'In your parlance, Malcolm—as well as can be expected,' James said. 'Isn't that what you physicians tell us?'

Malcolm Sedgewick smiled, acknowledging James's wry humour.

'Unfortunately,' James continued, 'my son Edward and his family will not be attending. Edward's regiment is to remain on standby. Just in case they are needed.'

'I get the impression things are becoming rather tense on the sub-continent.'

James toyed with his glass. 'True. The troublemakers are becoming better organised. It will be a challenge to keep a lid on the escalating violence,' he said, referring to a situation that would become known as the Indian Mutiny of 1857.

The doctor decided to change the subject, sympathetic to his friend's concern for his son, soon to be posted to Bengal. 'And what about the guest of honour for the coming celebration?'

James shrugged. 'Well, I'm afraid Eliza is still infatuated with the young man. Of course, I have banned him from the house.'

Dr Sedgewick was rather uncomfortable about the turn of the conversation, feeling a pang of guilt that his own daughter had played a part in Eliza's involvement with the shipping clerk. He was also grateful that James made no mention of the connection. He adopted a conciliatory response. 'All first loves tend to be based on infatuation. They inevitably fade as time passes. And as often more appropriate suitors enter their lives.'

'Let us hope your diagnosis is correct, Malcolm. I have other expectations for my daughter.'

There was an awkward pause, with seemingly little more to say on the subject. Malcolm turned over an idea. Perhaps his suggestion might, in part, make up for Vicky's involvement.

'What about getting Eliza more involved in things leading up to the party,' Sedgewick began. 'It could take her mind off, er, other matters.'

James was none the wiser. 'How do you propose I do that?'

Malcolm adopted a conspiratorial demeanor. 'I was thinking of something that is irresistible to women. All women. Young and old.'

James was intrigued by Malcolm's enigmatic comments. 'What on earth?' he began.

Malcolm cut him short, playing his trump card. 'Shopping.'

James shook his head, still uncertain. 'Shopping?'

Malcolm nodded. 'Shopping. All women love it. Just turn Eliza loose on the fashion houses, dressmakers, the George Street Emporium, the big stores ... and give her an open cheque!'

James took another swig at his Scotch, digesting his friend's suggestion.

Malcolm continued, 'Vicky could accompany her. A friend as a chaperone. Won't be so, so obvious, eh?'

James replaced his glass and looked at his friend. He inclined his head as he smiled. 'You could be right!'



The carriage had been tethered to a hitching rail over the street from the store of Gloria Alexander for more than two hours. The store's signage promised gowns, formal apparel and fashion accessories, hats, bonnets, underwear and accoutrements. Slumped in the carriage, fast asleep, Thomas was lost to the world of fashion. The day had been spent in similar manner, involving interminable waiting outside the city's clothing and footwear stores, jewellers and drapers' houses with imported silks, fine cotton and linens. From remarks made by Mistress Eliza and her friend Vicky, Thomas had gleaned that the buying expedition would involve more than a single day and extend to visits to seamstresses, with subsequent fitting visits in the future. He was resigned to his fate, as was the two-horse team.

Vicky sat on a stool and watched Eliza wriggling into a dress. It

was a creation of tulle and lace, stretched on hoops, which caused the garment to lift and swirl with each body movement as if possessed of a life of its own. Eliza glanced over her shoulder for a reaction by her friend. Vicky crooked her head, considered for a few moments, then gave a slow nod of approval.

Next, Eliza twisted around in a formal gown, a shimmering creation of silk and semi-precious stones. Eliza raised an eyebrow and looked to Vicky for a verdict.

An hour later the friends were at the George Street Emporium. Eliza stood before a gilt-framed mirror, trying a selection of hats, some with ribbons, others trimmed with brilliantly coloured feathers from rainforest parrots as far away as the southern Americas. Turning this way and that, she clowned about in the most ostentatious ones, amusing Vicky, much to the consternation of the sales assistant.

In the shoe department, a sales assistant slipped slender pumps with small silver buckles onto Eliza's feet. Unimpressed, Vicky shook her head. Before leaving the Emporium, Eliza paused to drape a glossy silk shawl of many colours about her shoulders. Vicky flashed a broad smile of approval but Eliza shrugged it off and draped the shawl around her friend. Eliza nodded approval and indicated to a hovering sales girl to wrap the item for her companion. The final call of a busy day was to the dressmaker's.

Late in the afternoon their carriage was homeward bound. The two young women shared the seats with variously sized boxes tied with ribbons. The shopping orgy was well and truly underway.



Eliza and George had found a peaceful green on a slope above George Street, a few blocks from The Rocks. The square was flanked by office buildings and comfortable terrace houses popular with the

professional classes and wealthy merchants. The sheltering trees and secluded park benches made it an oasis in the midst of the city.

They settled on a bench and for a while sat in silence, idly watching an old man toss bread scraps to the pigeons. It was an awkward silence, and their first meeting in two weeks.

With a sideways inclination of his head, George indicated the direction of Clyde Street, a few blocks away. 'So ... shall we spend some time together? It seems like ages since ...'

Eliza smiled ruefully. 'Afraid not, my dearest. As it is, I'm supposed to be having a dress fitting. Thomas is waiting in George Street.'

George felt as though his heart was being crushed. The chasm between them appeared to be widening. He heaved an exaggerated sigh. 'Ah, yes. The party dress.'

Eliza took his hand. 'It will be the final fitting. You do want me to look, well, presentable.'

George was not to be easily placated. 'Who for? That Arundel chap?'

Eliza grasped his other hand and looked into his eyes. 'You know I wish to look my best for you.'

George remained moodily silent, so Eliza pressed on. 'Look at it this way. It could serve for our special occasions.'

George relented a touch. 'I'm sorry, Eliza. I suppose it is ... just that I cannot help feeling I am being left out of your life. And an important event in that life.'

Eliza leaned close and kissed his cheek. 'You know that I will not let anything come between us. I am here with you now against my father's wishes.'

George looked down, a picture of misery. Eliza shook her head. 'You are my life. And one party is not going to change that.'

George raised his head and mustered a wan smile. Eliza disengaged their hands. 'Now, I really must be off, dearest. Please, please, don't be so sad. We have so much to look forward to.'

They stood up and, hand in hand, they walked down the path that led towards her carriage.



A beaming James, Eliza by his side, stood on the front steps to greet the Arundels, who stepped out of the Donnithornes' carriage which had been sent to fetch them from Circular Quay.

'Welcome to Sydney, my lord and lady,' James announced. 'It is a treat to see you again.' James kissed Lady Arundel's cheeks and warmly shook her husband's hand. Lady Arundel turned to peck Eliza on the cheek.

'You have blossomed into a beautiful rose, my dear,' she said.

Eliza responded with a curtsy and murmured, 'Thank you, ma'am.'

Lord Arundel clasped Eliza's gloved hand. 'Hmm. Indeed she has! Charmed, my dear.' He turned to indicate Charles. 'And this, of course, is Charles. You met back at Twickenham.'

Charles stepped forward and feasted his eyes on Eliza. 'I say,' he began, 'how delightful to see you again, Miss Eliza!'

'Thank you, Charles,' Eliza responded formally. 'We do trust you enjoy your stay at Camperdown Lodge.' There was a brief pause. Eliza turned to James. 'Oh, Papa, I recall there is something which calls for my attention.'

James nodded, though not entirely pleased by his daughter's behaviour. Eliza bestowed one of her beaming smiles on the Arundels. 'So, if you would kindly excuse me.'

Lady Arundel, still struck by how the girl she had last seen had become a strikingly beautiful young woman, told Eliza, 'Of course, my dear. We shall have lots of time to catch up.'

Charles tracked Eliza's departure, clearly smitten by the golden-haired vision with the most extraordinary blue eyes. 'I say, what a charming girl,' he murmured, mostly to himself.

James smiled broadly and indicated Elizabeth and Sarah, who were hovering inside the entrance chamber. 'This is Elizabeth, and her sister, Sarah. They will take you to your quarters and attend to anything you may require. I imagine you must be tired after such a long journey.'

'Yes, James,' said Lord Arundel, 'We had better be at our best for Eliza's party, eh?'

'Indeed, my lord,' James replied, inwardly pleased by his guest's jovial disposition, and especially by the presence of the son and heir.



Eliza had decided to give Vicky a preview of the gowns and outfits just delivered from four dressmaking establishments she had kept busy over past days. Mont Eagle House was the chosen venue to ensure privacy and scrutiny from curious eyes. The private fashion show occupied more than two hours, after which Eliza brought Vicky up to date with recent events.

On learning of the arrival of the Arundels, Vicky exclaimed, 'Just think. You could end up a lady, a duchess, or, er, whatever ...'

Eliza smiled. As always, Vicky was a tonic to be with. 'There's just one problem. I have no intention of becoming involved with the Right Honourable Charles.'

Vicky playfully displayed sudden enlightenment. 'You mean there is now a chance for me?'

Eliza went along with the tease. 'Yes. I suppose you might make a handsome couple. In the meantime, I plan to remain an enthusiastic shopper. Which reminds me, the mission is not yet over.'

'Do you mean we are off to the stores? Again? I do not believe there is an Aladdin's palace of sartorial delights we have not visited yet.'

'Very colourfully put. I thought so myself, dear Vicky. However, Papa is keen for me to visit the equestrian outfitters on Pitt Street.'

Vicky was still mystified. 'Your father has also wished to separate you from horses—and with good reason. So what is so different now?'

Eliza had wondered about that herself at first. Then it had dawned on her—it was part of her father's long-term plans for her future. 'Papa thinks that my becoming a member of the horsey set is important. For the circles he imagines I will belong to one day. He is mistaken, of course, but ... well, he has been so generous, I feel obliged to humour him.'

Vicky digested Eliza's response. She looked at Eliza. 'What does George think of all this. And your present preoccupations?'

The mood between them changed abruptly. Vicky had raised a subject Eliza was not completely comfortable with.

'George understands about the party and things leading up to it. I explained that it is a family tradition.'

Vicky was not reassured. 'Have you seen him lately?' she asked quietly.

Eliza wished Vicky had not mentioned it. She had a pang of guilt over George being left out and did not want to be reminded of it. 'There have been so many things happening lately,' she managed, 'so I haven't seen him as often as I wished.'

There was silence. Vicky knew that she had struck a raw nerve. But she was not finished. 'Do you love George?' she asked softly.

Eliza was taken aback by her friend's directness. 'Of course I do! I have told Papa I wish to marry him. You know that.'

Vicky inclined her head in acknowledgement. 'Yes. You told me that. And I am delighted for you. Only ...'

Eliza was cautious. 'Only what?' she asked, unsure what might be coming next.

Vicky hesitated, then chose her words in measured deliberation. 'Just do not permit other things to come between you. Love can be fragile. It needs to be cherished. And protected.'

Eliza had never heard her usually effervescent friend speak with

such introspection. 'If you must know,' she began, 'I am not a jot interested in Charles Arundel. Nor anyone else. Above all else, George is the man in my life. My world would be empty without him.'

Vicky produced a wan smile. 'Of course, dearest Eliza. Just be sure that he knows that.'

Vicky's words laid bare something Eliza had tried to suppress and which, in the process, had justified immersing herself in her coming-of-age party. The shopping sprees, the Arundels' arrival with their son and heir, the grand plans, and other things for which money was no object had been carefully orchestrated by her father, who clearly had his own ideas of what her future should be. She felt ashamed and unworthy. She was close to tears.

Without another word Vicky placed her arms about her friend and held her in a close embrace.



On the night of the party Camperdown Lodge was ablaze with light. A stream of carriages jostled for space on the driveway. Music, laughter, and the muted voices of partygoers floated out into the night air. Many locals and passers-by gathered at the gates to gaze at the grand spectacle.

In the reception room James looked proudly on as Eliza, holding a silver knife in delicate manicured hands, pushed it into a soaring three-tiered cake. She looked up, surrendered the knife to a hovering waiter, and smilingly acknowledged the explosion of applauding guests.

As the orchestra, set up on a brightly decorated dais at one end of the room, played, James stepped forward and gave Eliza a hug to the three traditional birthday cheers. Guests crowded around Eliza and James, offering congratulations, hugs and kisses. The conductor stabbed the air with his baton to signal the commencement of the first waltz. Beneath beautiful coloured banners and ribbons that

streamed from the high vaulted ceiling, the elegantly attired guests vacated their tables to take to the floor.

Charles Arundel made a beeline for Eliza and announced, 'I claim the first dance!' He extended a crooked arm to Eliza, who momentarily hesitated, then accepted the invitation. James smiled as he tracked the pair taking to the floor to dance a Viennese waltz. As they glided about, acknowledging smiles and congratulatory remarks from other couples, Charles chatted away to Eliza. She responded only when he looked directly at her and then she would produce a fixed smile or vacantly incline her head to simulate interest. When a young man playfully cut in and claimed a portion of the waltz with the radiant guest of honour, Eliza accepted enthusiastically, to Charles's chagrin.

It was an exhausting evening for Eliza. A legion of males sought to partner her. Many of the younger people were from the restoration committee of St Stephen's, former school friends, and those she had come to know through her friendship with Vicky.

The time for the traditional last waltz was approaching.



Despite a self-imposed resolve not to be within a mile of Eliza's party, George had found himself at the gates of Camperdown Lodge. He gazed up the carriage-jammed driveway. The music, laughter and sounds of celebrating guests seemed to beckon. He walked slowly past the carriages, their horses and drivers who were clustered together in quiet conversations, up towards the mansion.

George left the path and pushed through some shrubbery to a French door leading into the ballroom. It was a strange experience, to be at his beloved Eliza's home, seeing the interior of Camperdown Lodge for the first time. The brilliantly lit room, its handsome furnishings and glittering decoration, the formally clad men, the women's finery, the sheer richness of the setting, gave him a great

feeling of inadequacy. How could he ever have entertained the ambition that he could provide a life and environment fit for a sophisticated, educated and privileged young woman such as Eliza? George had come face to face with reality. He realised that he needed to accept a seemingly unattainable desire and ambition for their lives together—or turn and walk away forever, and never see Eliza again. The moment of decision had arrived.



Eliza was seated at the table of honour, flanked by James, Lord and Lady Arundel, Charles, and Vicky and Malcolm Sedgewick. A clock began striking the hour as the orchestra leader stepped to the edge of the dais. He tapped his baton on a metal music stand to attract attention over the hubbub of conversations. 'Ladies and gentlemen! Your attention, please!' he called. The murmurs and occasional bursts of laughter gradually subsided. 'It is time for the final waltz of the evening,' he continued. 'And, as it's said that the last dance should be with the one who is special in your life ... would you please select your partners.'

Charles pushed back his chair and clambered to his feet. He turned to Eliza. 'I would be most honoured to be your partner, Eliza.'

Eliza looked up and hesitated. James and the Arundels exchanged knowing smiles. Eliza shot a glance to Vicky, then slowly pushed back her chair.

George Cuthbertson strode down the black-and-white tiled hallway, took a deep here-goes sort of breath, then entered the ballroom. George, in a business suit, attracted curious glances as he passed among the couples straggling onto the floor for the last dance.

Eliza was on her feet. Charles held out his arm to lead her onto the floor. The orchestra struck up a fanfare, preparatory to leading into the waltz.

George brushed past Charles and confronted Eliza. 'I believe this should be ours, Eliza,' he said quietly, extending his arm.

It was as if the moment was frozen in time. Eliza blinked in disbelief. The others at the table were stunned. Charles stood, his crooked arm still extended.

With a heart seemingly thumping in her ears, Eliza smiled nervously and reached out to accept George's hand. Charles found his voice. 'I say, old chap,' he began, 'this was my dance!'

Eliza and George threaded their way through other couples to join in the waltz. James groped for something appropriate to say to the bewildered Arundels. Vicky whispered to her father, 'Looks like Eliza needs some help.'

Malcolm Sedgewick turned to his daughter. 'What are you talking about?' Without responding, Vicky scrambled to her feet and held out her arm to Charles. 'I claim you for the last waltz, Charles,' she announced.

She steered Charles out onto the dance floor. To James, it was like an unfolding nightmare. It seemed that those around him were taking leave of their senses. He gathered himself and somehow produced a strained smile. 'These young people are always getting up to their pranks, eh?' he told the Arundels with a theatrical chuckle.

Eliza and George danced close among the other circling couples. 'You are full of surprises,' Eliza said.

George assumed an apologetic expression. 'You have every right to be cross.'

Eliza considered a few moments. 'Yes. I do have the right to be cross,' she said, adding, 'but I'm not.'

'So, you mean I'm forgiven? For crashing your party?'

Eliza raised her shoulders in a gesture of acceptance. 'There's nothing to forgive.'

Vicky and Charles waltzed close by. With a meaningful smile, Vicky called to them. 'Nice to see you again, George.'

As the couples drew apart, Charles asked, 'So! You know that chap?' Vicky nodded. 'I have met George. He's not so bad.'

Charles was not so easily placated. 'He seems to be a bit of a bounder to me.'

Vicky smiled reassuringly. 'He is quite a nice, er, chap. Once you get to know him, Charlie.'

Charles was stunned. 'You called me Charlie!' he exclaimed.

Vicky pouted. 'Well, it is your name. Albeit in an abbreviated form. Right?'

Charles grinned. 'Yes. But only the Cambridge chaps from Kings College ever called me that, when we played them at cricket.'

Vicky tried to look impressed. 'Really. Charlie must suit you!'

Charles shook his head, enjoying the tease. 'I say, you are a jolly good sport, Miss Vicky!'

Time was running out for Eliza and George. They knew that the waltz would not last forever. 'We will always call this waltz our song, my darling,' he said.

'Because you burst in upon my party?' Eliza asked him playfully.

George shook his head. 'Because it is the time I asked you to marry me.'

Eliza looked into his eyes and drew closer. 'It's also special because it's when I said yes.'

The dance came to an end and the guests started to drift from the floor. Eliza and George embraced, ignoring the smiles and curious glances of those streaming past. The embrace melted into a lingering kiss. It was as though they were the only people in the room.

When the kiss had ended, George looked about. 'I suppose it might be best if I left,' he began.

Eliza held him firmly by the elbows. 'Don't you dare, George Cuthbertson! We will face the music together! Only ... let's leave the talking to me,' she added with a rueful smile.

Chapter Eleven

The party was over, the grand reception room near deserted. The staff were removing the remnants of the evening. Standing in the centre of the chamber, James waited until the last of the servants and hired help had departed. Then he turned to confront his daughter and the young man who, in his eyes, had invaded the proceedings. Eliza and George braced themselves for what might follow.

James spoke quietly at first, though with increasing anger. 'I should like to thank both of you,' he began. 'Thank you for bringing humiliation and embarrassment to this household. For demeaning what was supposed to be a special party with a legacy of happy memories. And for making us the subject of conjecture, gossip and the topic of conversation at dinner tables throughout the city.'

As James paused to gather his breath, Eliza and George exchanged brief glances. James turned his indignation to George. 'And you, Mr what's-your-name, were not invited to our party. Nor were you welcome!'

As George made to respond, Eliza motioned him to remain silent, and spoke up. 'His name is George, Papa, as I have informed you. And he had every right to be present.'

James was incredulous. 'Every right, you say?'

Eliza fought to steady her nerves and prevent her voice from wavering. 'Yes. It was supposed to be my party. And ... and, George is my fiancé.'

James was stunned. 'Fiancé!'

George wanted to support Eliza. It was time to be heard. 'I should have preferred to have asked you for Eliza's hand in ...' he began.

James cut him short. 'Then you would have been wasting your time!'

Eliza felt under control, fuelled in part by growing resentment. 'We are to be wed, Papa. And should welcome your blessing.'

James glanced to the ceiling, as if seeking divine intervention. He glared back at the pair. 'Married! I ... I forbid this insanity!'

'You forget, Papa,' Eliza responded quietly, 'I am now come of age. And I shall wed the person of my choice.'

James was speechless. Still quietly under control, Eliza added, 'Of course, your blessing and good wishes would mean a great deal. We respect you and your position. But these things are up to you.'

Eliza turned to George. 'I had better see you off. We appear to be done for now.' She looked to James. 'Good night, Papa.'

A nervous George managed, 'Good evening, sir.'

James did not respond. He watched Eliza and the young man leave. Then he walked unsteadily to a chair. He felt a tightening in his chest and had trouble catching his breath.

Vashi appeared, which signalled he probably had been eavesdropping. He hurried to James, who was slumped in the chair. 'Are you all right, sir?' he asked. 'Shall I fetch Dr Sedgewick?'

James slowly shook his head. 'That shan't be necessary. Just leave me be for a few moments.'

Vashi was not convinced. He noticed that James was having difficulty breathing, that his eyes were dulled, his face grey. James had aged ten years. 'I'm not leaving you, sir. There must be something I should do.'

James gulped a few shallow breaths, as though struggling for sufficient air. Speaking with difficulty he said, 'Well, Vashi. Perhaps you might help me upstairs.'

'Of course, sir. That's if you think you can ...' Vashi began, doubting whether helping his master to his distant quarters would be a sensible thing to do.

Vashi reached down and eased James from the chair, draping his master's arm about his shoulders and taking up the weight. Ever so slowly, step by scraping step, Vashi guided James towards the stairs.

'Now, just one at a time, sir,' Vashi said. James took the first riser. 'Rest,' said Vashi. James stood, leaning against Vashi for a few moments, catching his breath. 'Now step,' Vashi encouraged. After what seemed to be an eternity, they reached the first floor.

James stood, leaning on Vashi, resting before starting down a long hallway to his quarters. 'Sometimes I wonder what I should do without you, Vashi,' he rasped.

Vashi again took his arm and smiled. 'I shall always be here for you, sir. Now, another step. Then we rest.'



On the far side of the world, it was a sad, worrying time at Colne Lodge. Edward, in his colonel's uniform of 16th Queen's Lancers, stood on the front steps bidding farewell to Penelope. His batman waited by the carriage.

Edward spoke in a brisk manner, hoping to mask his own emotions. 'See that you take good care of yourself, my girl,' he said to Penelope, who was close to tears. She nodded mutely, desolate that her mother wasn't here to comfort her. Elizabeth had died suddenly a few months earlier.

'Please be careful, Papa,' she said softly.

Edward affected a confident bravado. 'Hey! I have a whole regiment to look out for me.'

'A whole year. Maybe more,' Penelope said. 'It's such a long time.'

'It shouldn't take too long to sort things out, my dear.'

Penelope watched as Edward strode down the steps. He turned and gave a farewell wave. The carriage rattled towards the gate. Tethered to the vehicle was Edward's personal mount, Roger, trotting off to war in distant India.



Almost a week had passed. Eliza waited anxiously outside the door to James's chambers. She had been standing in the passageway for more than half an hour although it had seemed much longer. At last the door opened and Malcolm Sedgewick appeared, black bag in hand. He pulled the door shut and turned to Eliza. 'You can see your father now, Eliza,' he said.

Eliza searched his face for a clue. 'Just how is Papa?'

Dr Sedgewick smiled reassuringly. 'He should be all right. It has been a nasty turn. Your father has been overdoing things, as I'm sure you're aware. And he's under some stress. However, these past days of rest have done him good.'

Eliza nodded. She was aware of the strong possibility that she had contributed to her father's condition. As if reading her thoughts, Dr Sedgewick reached out and squeezed her hand.

'Now, don't start worrying, Eliza. Your father needs you to give him support and reassurance. He is looking forward to seeing you,' he told her softly.

James looked pale and drawn, propped up in bed with his silk robe over casual day clothes. He brightened visibly when Eliza appeared. He put aside some documents and patted the bed beside him. 'Here, my child,' he said with a faint smile.

Eliza settled down beside James and kissed him on the cheek. 'How are you feeling, Papa?'

'Well, the good doctor says I shan't be joining the turf club,' James shrugged. 'At least, not yet!'

Eliza raised a smile, noting his sense of humour as a good sign. She looked at his discarded papers. 'I suspect that he also told you not to concern yourself with matters of business.'

James considered the advice. 'Hmm. Sometimes you sound just like your dear mother.'

Eliza smiled sadly. She was obliged to sniff away some tears which threatened to make their appearance.

After a pause, James said, 'I do regret having missed the departure of our guests.'

'Lord and Lady Arundel understand, Papa. They were most concerned about you,' Eliza reassured him.

James nodded. There was something else on his mind. Almost cautiously, he asked, 'And, er, what about young Charles?'

Eliza smiled broadly, as though something had tickled her fancy. 'For some days he and Vicky have been out and about. Seeing the sights. They seem to have hit it off. In fact, I'd say they have become great friends.'

James raised an eyebrow. 'Well, I'll be ... that's splendid!'

There was an awkward silence. Eliza sensed her father was turning over something in his mind. Eventually, he cleared his throat. 'When we lost your dear mother and your sisters back in India,' he said, 'I promised myself something.' He spoke in a measured tone. Eliza remained silent, unsure where he might be heading.

He went on, elaborating what had been on his mind. 'I promised myself that I would create a new, secure life for you. That you would receive the best things that life could offer. A bright future. And the love and affection which your mother would have wished.'

There was another pause. James reached out and took Eliza by the hand. 'Tell me, child. Do you really want to spend your life, your future, with ... George?'

Eliza was taken aback by the directness of the question. She slowly nodded her head. 'I love him, Papa,' she said, almost in a whisper.

'And, are you certain, that he ...?'

Eliza cut in. 'Indeed! Papa!'

James considered for a few moments, then mustered a smile. 'Well, I suppose that's it, then.'

Eliza could scarcely believe her ears. 'Papa?'

'Just when would you wish to wed this most fortunate young man?' he began indulgently.

Eliza shook her head, although not in the negative. 'Oh, Papa! Soon! As soon as possible.'

James assumed a grave expression, although inwardly he was touched by Eliza's happy, radiant response. 'We have much to talk about, and matters to discuss,' he announced. 'So George had better come around to tea. I should be up and about directly. So, let us make it Sunday.'

Eliza, still in disbelief at the sudden change in her life's fortune, leaned across to her father and embraced him. They held each other tight. James could feel his strength returning, as if it were derived from the warmth of his daughter.



Long after she had left, James thought about the prospect of a vastly different future than he had anticipated for Eliza. Her happiness helped make up for much of his own disappointment. Over recent days as he lay confined to bed, James had had time to consider the future in the light of new developments flowing from Eliza's relationship with George Cuthbertson. He could oppose the union and lose his daughter, or give his blessing and continue to be a part of Eliza's life. There was one issue of prime importance he needed to address, however. He awaited next Sunday with anticipation.

On Sunday afternoon a nervous George Cuthbertson arrived for tea with Eliza and her father. He had been collected from his Clyde

Street lodgings by Thomas in the household carriage—a suggestion made by Eliza, who felt that it would be a courtesy and a symbol that George now had a special relationship with Camperdown Lodge. James, keen to introduce the broom of change as harmoniously as possible, went along with the proposal.

Sarah and Angela served the trio in the small dining room, traditionally reserved for family and house guests. At the beginning the atmosphere was very formal with some awkward silences and measured conversation. But by the time some scones and strawberry jam had been eaten, the mood became more relaxed.

James steered the conversation to wedding plans. It was agreed that two months would be needed to make all arrangements, which included combining two adjoining guest quarters into a private suite for the newlyweds. It was clear that George was not in a position to provide suitable accommodation, and since James had announced that Eliza would inherit Camperdown Lodge and most of his business empire, there seemed little to be gained by moving elsewhere. The arrangement also suited Eliza, who was concerned for the welfare of her father. He was still not in the best of health.

Once those details had been settled, James turned to Eliza with a playful smile. 'Now I believe the time has come for George and me to retire to the study. For some men's business.'

Eliza was intuitively cautious, although partly reassured by her father's demeanour. Sensing her uncertainty, James added, 'I promise he will be returned to you. Safe and sound within the hour.'

In the study, James led George over to a small, ornately carved side table surrounded by leather-padded easy chairs, thereby avoiding a formal exchange across his vast desk.

After a few opening pleasantries, James got down to business. George sat in silence until James concluded explaining what had been on his mind, and which would be of significance to his future son-in-law.

‘To sum up, what I am proposing should make you financially secure. And this would appear to be a desirable position to be in when about to embark on matrimony, eh?’

George nodded in acknowledgement. ‘Yes, sir. And while I am flattered that you should consider me for a position of responsibility in your business endeavours, my only experience is as a records clerk for the Playfair Providors company, servicing the needs of shipping.’

James shrugged as though George had supported his case. ‘Then it is clear that you are familiar with office procedures, record-keeping and accounting. I am not flattering you, young man. I am offering you a job.’

James leaned forward, groping for his cigar box which lay on the table. He clipped the end of a cigar with small silver scissors. ‘I have an able business manager. Mr Vashi Larkman mostly concerns himself with our distant operations.’ James placed the cigar in his mouth and lit the Havana leaf, sucking the cigar to life. Turning back to George, he added, ‘Your responsibilities would be closer to home. To convey reports and information directly to me.’

George sat quietly, digesting the offer. He knew that accepting it would mean surrendering his independence. It would also be an acknowledgement that he alone was incapable of providing for his bride. On the other hand, that was precisely the situation and he was aware that James might be using that to exert control over him.

James seemed to read his mind. With another draw at the glowing cigar, he looked directly to George. ‘Do you accept my proposition? For Eliza? For your own future?’ He then played his emotive hand. ‘And for me? Keeping in mind my doctor has ordered me to reduce my work in the interests of remaining in the world.’

George felt like a fox caught in a trap. A refusal could easily be construed as being heartless and uncooperative. Even ungrateful. He could not win.

James leaned forward and extended his hand. George realised he

had no alternative. He inclined his head and accepted the handshake. James beamed a warm smile. 'Splendid! A wise decision, George.'

Once George had rejoined Eliza, James sat, chewing and puffing on the shrinking cigar. He knew that his ever-loyal Vashi would most likely be disappointed, even threatened, at George's appointment. With the passage of time, though, James was confident everything would settle down. After all, James had been obliged to compromise himself and so should his personal aide.



On a Saturday in June 1886, Colbert Moore and the Bailey sisters sat in the small courtyard of the Lennox Street cottage, which Elizabeth had deemed more welcoming with its splintery sun than the chill of indoors.

The young journalist's relationship with the former maids had become more relaxed and almost, but not quite, informal, as he was taken farther into the world of Eliza Donnithorne. A small metal garden table had been placed before Moore's bench, which served for his note taking.

Elizabeth Bailey paused, having reached the point when Eliza and George Cuthbertson's betrothal had been accepted by James, albeit a touch cautiously, with wedding plans about to get under way.

'However,' she began, 'there was one person displeased with developments. Vashi Larkman considered his position under threat by George Cuthbertson's impending appointment to the master's business empire.'

Sarah contributed, 'He also thought that Miss Eliza had humiliated her father by manipulating him into approving her marriage to a lowly shipping clerk.'

Elizabeth nodded agreement. 'Looking back, it was obviously only a matter of time before Vashi would strike. Though nobody,

I suppose, could have anticipated just how this would come about, and how devastating it would be.'

Colbert put aside his notebook, his curiosity aroused. 'Why do you imagine that no one seemed to have been wary of Vashi, given matters of the past?' he asked.

Elizabeth shrugged. 'I suppose everyone was so occupied with the plans, excitement and activities for the coming nuptials, there was little else in their minds.'

'It was back to the shopping and the seamstresses all over again, much to Miss Eliza's delight!' Sarah said.

Chapter Twelve

The clock was striking 10 AM when Eliza and Vicky left on another shopping expedition. This time it would be wedding clothes, for herself and for Vicky, who was to be Eliza's maid of honour.

From his study window, James watched the carriage crunch down the driveway to join the late-morning traffic heading for Sydney Town. He did not let the curtains fall back into place until the carriage was lost to sight.

Settled comfortably in the carriage, Vicky shook her head, still in near-disbelief, as Eliza expounded on plans for the forthcoming mission. 'Just imagine,' she exclaimed, 'you can spend anything you wish ... on anything you choose!' It was truly wondrous for her best friend and she was hard-pressed not to entirely suppress a pang of envy.

Eliza smiled, fuelled by Vicky's enthusiasm.

'You might even send your father bankrupt,' Vicky suggested playfully.

Eliza considered a moment, then with mock gravity told Vicky, 'You may be assured, I'm doing my best. Believe me.'

The first stop was at Miss Scott's, which was renowned for being the first with the latest fashions from London and Paris. It also specialised in bridalwear and related accessories, offering a range of made-to-measure outfits and fittings at customers' home by highly qualified seamstresses.

Thomas was resigned to yet another long wait. He tethered the carriage in a sheltered position and made for a nearby tearooms from where he could watch over his carriage and keep the entrance to Miss Scott's in sight.

The next port of call was to select more discreet items, which ran the spectrum of stockings, garters, pantaloons and other items of the world of fashion and feminine mystique. Not nearly as glamorous as the petticoats were the corsets of whalebone and tapes, pragmatic and constrictive creations to squeeze the most protesting flesh into hourglass shapes rarely intended by nature. Then it was the turn of more informal attire suitable for honeymoon wear, picnics, indoor lunches with company, strolling on balmy sunny afternoons, travel and sight-seeing expeditions. James had offered to send the newlyweds on an extended holiday to England and Europe, including a stay at Colne Lodge at Twickenham.

Late in the day, when their shoes had started to pinch, they farewelled the magical world of pearls from the Pacific, lace from Ireland, silks and brocade from China, linen from the Midlands, fur from Australia and Canada—some of which would impact upon the credit account of one James Donnithorne, Esquire, underwriter of the glorious spending spree—and turned for home.

The Donnithorne household was a hive of increasing activity as the weeks slipped by and the wedding loomed ever closer. The Reverend Kemp would conduct the service at St Stephen's, the family's place of worship which also was of special significance for Eliza and George. The chores were carried out to the tapping of hammers, sawing of wood and other sounds of carpentry from the trades and craftsmen busily engaged in creating living quarters for the betrothed.

Downstairs in the servants' station, preparations seemed to stretch away without end in view. Angela and Rose spent days seated at the chamber's long table, preparing seldom-used Venetian glassware, polishing the exquisite pieces of glowing colour trimmed

in 22-carat gold until they glistened like jewels. Then it was the turn of the crystalware and mountains of silver. Each would be coaxed to glittering brilliance, before being placed by gloved hands in orderly rows on black velvet, then covered in protective shrouds of fine linen, awaiting the day of liberation. Their orders had been clear. Everything was to reflect and represent perfection. Time, labour and expense posed no obstacles.

In the brightness of the morning room, Eliza was tightly corseted by a seamstress, who pulled with professional firmness on the straps. Eliza gripped the edge of the mantelpiece during the operation, watched by an amused Vicky who was seated by the window. The seamstress slipped a partially completed wedding gown over Eliza's head. Eliza stood, statue-like, while the white silk was pulled this way and that and pins were inserted.

Eliza turned gingerly to Vicky, mindful of the fragility of the gown's embryonic stage of development. 'Well, what do you think?' she asked.

'So far so good,' was the verdict.

The seamstress guided Eliza across the room to a full-length mirror, carrying the garment's train over a crooked elbow. 'See for yourself, Miss Donnithorne,' she said. Eliza took in the present state of the gown, with its lustrous pearls around the neckline and intricate lace panels on the upper sleeves.

'Yes. It's lovely,' she said.

The seamstress gently slipped the dress clear of her head. Eliza looked at Vicky. 'It's your turn, oh maid-of-honour to be,' she announced. 'Starting with the corsets!'



James turned his attention to the guest list. He had a clear idea of just who ought to be invited to what would be one of the most impressive

weddings that Sydney had witnessed. He took some pride in noting that it had already attracted the attention of the *Sydney Morning Herald*, which had run a piece following the announcement of Eliza's engagement. It looked as though James's biggest problem would be who to exclude, keeping in mind the legions within government, business and society who expected to be invited. They would include the governor, senior officials, administrators, business leaders, members of the judiciary, the clergy, his own clients, contacts in a variety of commercial undertakings, friends, colleagues, visiting dignitaries and, of course, younger folk, who would include Eliza's friends from her former college, her association with the church, and those friendships formed through her close relationship with Vicky Sedgewick. The groom's family, most of whom lived in and around London, had indicated there was little likelihood of attendance, given their circumstances, even had there been sufficient time to undertake the long voyage necessary.

James had given close attention to just how events were to unfold. Guests would be invited to gather at Camperdown Lodge at 11 AM for pre-wedding refreshments. With the best man, Brian Weston, a colleague of George's, they would await the arrival of the groom, who would be driven by Thomas from his Clyde Street lodgings. Then, at quarter to twelve, the guests, groom and best man would leave for the short journey to St Stephen's to await the arrival of the bride, maid of honour and father of the bride for the 12.30 PM service. Then everyone would return to Camperdown Lodge for the wedding feast, which should occupy much of the afternoon.

On the eve of the wedding a stream of vans and delivery carts rattled through the gates, laden with flowers, foodstuffs of many varieties and beverages to supplement the house's well-stocked larder and cellars. Two chefs and assistants, from the Hotel Sydney and the Astoria restaurant, joined Margaret, Angela and Rose preparing the food. Early the following morning hired waiters, serving maids,

beverage mixers and musicians would arrive. The Lodge's grand piano had been rolled into place at the entrance to the long dining room—the pianist, along with violinists, a flautist and a harpist, would provide welcoming music for the arriving guests. It would be truly a day to remember.

Eliza and George sought refuge from the preparations and people in the secluded security of a gazebo in the lower reaches of the grounds beyond the stables, making the most of their last time together before their wedding day.

George smiled wryly as they sat close together, clasping hands. 'I gather I'm not supposed to see you again—until tomorrow.'

'Then you will have the rest of your life to see me, darling,' Eliza said lightly, adding, 'I'll try not to be too late.'

George nodded. 'Ah, yes. Brides are not supposed to be too eager.'

Eliza smiled. 'Something like that.'

George considered for a few moments. 'You know, darling, I should have wished for, well, something with, er, less pomp and ceremony,' he ventured.

Eliza shrugged. 'Papa is old fashioned. He is conscious of tradition. The family. His position. He wants to be seen doing the appropriate thing. That's him, I'm afraid.'

George was not convinced. 'Seems like the wedding is for him.'

'George, my dearest. It's for me. Which also means, for us. It's his way of doing it.'

'Hmm. If you say so.'

Eliza squeezed his hands, leaned closer and locked George into her gaze. 'Let's save our first quarrel for after the wedding!'

A slow smile lit his face. 'I have a better idea. Let's not fight. Ever.'

As the late afternoon shadows grew in proportion to the retreat of the sun, from his office window Vashi watched Thomas deferentially tip his hat then open the carriage door for George Cuthbertson, who

nodded acknowledgement as he climbed aboard. Thomas shut the door, clambered upfront and with a flick of the reins set the carriage rolling towards the main gates.

Vashi turned away from the window. The ghost of a smile slowly appeared. He told himself that every dog had its day. And no day lasts forever.



Eliza stood in her bridal gown. Her hair, veil, the diamond-and-emerald necklace that had been her mother's—everything was in place. She looked every bit the radiant bride. Vicky was similarly groomed to complement the bride. Sarah had bustled about and assisted in the three hours it had taken to produce the desired results, and she continued to hover, feeling well pleased and a touch proprietorial.

Vicky spread her arms. 'So, we wait here until summoned?'

Eliza shrugged at the inevitable. 'Just like obedient little girls! Papa has it all planned. Bless him.'

Sarah sensed she was no longer required. 'Is there anything else you might need?'

'No, Sarah,' Eliza smiled. 'You go. And thank you for helping us into all the finery.'

With a brief, out-of-character curtsy, born of some awe at the vision in which she had played a part, Sarah took her leave.

'You had better take me through it again,' said Vicky. 'It all seems rather like a military operation.'

Eliza pouted. 'The guests gather downstairs—in fact, most of them should be there by now. Once the nervous groom has arrived and everyone has had something to eat, and perhaps a dram or two, they are all off to the church, to await the star players. Us!'

Vicky sank into a chair and motioned Eliza to follow her example.

Eliza pulled a face and plucked at the folds of her gown. 'I'm under strict orders. Not to sit. Or do anything that might crease this.'

Vicky adopted mock sympathy. 'Poor thing. Are you supposed to breathe?'

'Yes, but not too much,' Eliza giggled.



James stood at the entrance to the long dining room, welcoming arriving guests. Circling waiters with silver trays offered arrivals a choice of champagne, sherry, white wine or fruit juice with canapes, olives, spiced sardines on bread fingers and squares of cheese speared on wood splints.

A young man in formal attire emerged from the eclectic gathering to make himself known to James. 'Good morning, sir,' he announced. 'I am Brian Weston.' James was uncertain, although realised the name should have rung a bell. Weston grinned as they shook hands. 'I am said to be the best man, sir,' he explained.

James inclined his head in acknowledgement. 'Yes, of course. George did mention you, Mr Weston. You are most welcome. I understand you work together.'

Weston nodded. 'Yes, we do, sir.' He looked about. 'I say, where is the groom?'

James moved to greet some stragglers. 'The carriage was sent to fetch him. He should be here any time now. If you'll excuse me ...'

Weston nodded. 'Of course, Mr Donnithorne,' he said, accepting a glass of champagne from a silver tray.



After tethering the horses by a verandah post in the narrow Clyde Street, Thomas entered number 103. He mounted the narrow, creaking

stairs to the first floor and rapped on the door. There was no immediate response, so he rapped again, with more force. Still no response.

Thomas called, 'Mr Cuthbertson, sir! It's Thomas!' Again he rapped sharply. And again there was no response. He looked about the low-ceilinged passageway as if the answer might be elsewhere before he resumed his assault on the door. Thomas's attention was diverted by creaking from the stairway. A short balding man in his middle years appeared.

'What's the trouble?' he asked.

Thomas shrugged. 'Can't seem to make Mr Cuthbertson hear me.'

The newcomer pursed his lips. 'Of course you can't. The young gent's gone.'

Thomas was taken aback. 'He was supposed to wait for me. Must have taken a cab instead.'

'I'm the landlord,' the man announced, producing a key which he inserted into the lock. 'The tenant left last night. Take a look for yourself.' He pushed the door open and motioned Thomas to look within.

The scene that confronted Thomas told its own story. The place was cleaned out, clearly no longer occupied. Behind him the landlord elaborated, 'Left with four men. They collected his things, then they left in a carriage together.'

Thomas stood eyeing the vacated quarters. 'I don't understand,' he breathed softly.

Perhaps touched by Thomas's dismay, and sensing something was afoot, the landlord was moved to add, 'One of his friends come to my door. Paid the rent out, he did.'

Still bewildered, Thomas turned back to the landlord. 'There has to be a mistake. Cuthbertson is getting married today.'

The landlord grasped the door in a signal that explanations had ended and he had other things to do. 'I wouldn't know about that,' he said.



James stood with Malcolm Sedgewick near the main staircase, shocked by what Thomas had reported. From the direction of the long dining room the murmur of the guests could be heard. 'Surely there must be some explanation,' James said.

Uncomfortable at being the bearer of such bad news, Thomas nevertheless elaborated, 'Like I said, sir, the place be empty. And the rent's paid up.'

In growing desperation and at a complete loss, James turned to his friend. 'Malcolm, what ... what on earth am I to do?'

The doctor thought for a few moments. Mindful of the state of James's health and the enormity of what had occurred, he decided to shoulder some of the responsibility and take control as best he could. 'Firstly, Thomas should remain with the carriage on standby. Just in case. Next, I'll go upstairs and inform Eliza there's been a delay of sorts. That you are working to resolve the situation.'

James was uncertain. 'Shouldn't I deal with Eliza?'

Sedgewick shook his head. 'No, James. You want to think before confronting Eliza. You are needed down here. You'll have to inform the guests. Tell them something. Anything that, well, sounds plausible.'

James looked on the point of collapse. 'Oh, my god, Malcolm. How did all this happen?'

Sedgewick had no ready answer. 'Well, let's hope we learn soon. I imagine we shall. At least, let us pray that we do.'



TWO MONTHS EARLIER

Vashi was seated before the cluttered desk of Mr George Billington, Sydney manager for the Anglo-India Shipping Company. Amid the mess was a detailed model of the company's latest acquisition, a two-

masted square-rigged brig. Billington crooked his head, bemused by what he had been told. Choosing his words carefully, he replied, 'What you propose, Mr Smith, is most irregular. Probably bordering on criminality.'

Vashi leaned forward and locked Billington in a steady gaze. 'I'll tell you what is irregular, Mr Billington. It is that you, your associates—here, at sea, and in Bombay—are each to receive probably much more than the equivalent of one year's salary.'

Billington still had difficulty coming to terms with that which the intense Anglo-Indian, who had appeared from nowhere, was now proposing. 'Do you realise it would involve an act of international kidnapping? A capital offence?'

Vashi was unmoved. 'No more than what His Majesty's press gangs do at waterfront pubs on most Friday nights,' he replied disdainfully.

'Not really, Mr Smith. They are simply obtaining those persons required to man the King's ships.'

Vashi smiled. 'Exactly. And what I propose is to simply relocate one person who is not required. An act to further his career prospects. And to all intents and purposes, it will appear to be quite lawful.' Vashi produced a bulging package bound with white cord and placed it on the desk. Billington eyed it speculatively. Vashi patted the package. 'You will find the sum I have nominated is all there, Mr Billington. Do I leave this with you? Or do I go elsewhere?'

George Billington dragged his eyes from the package. 'You, er, must be a man of means, Mr Smith.'

'Let me put it this way, Mr Billington,' Vashi replied reassuringly, 'I am a person with access to means. Just as convenient.'

A silence descended, punctuated by the beating of a clock in a corner of the office. Billington came to a decision. He reached out and slid the package across the desk towards himself. 'I shall need to know the, er, specifics. To arrange the paperwork, which would be the key to the operation. And to put other things in train.'

Vashi smiled. 'Of course, Mr Billington. Time will be of prime importance. Though I am sure we have sufficient.'

Vashi extended his arm to Billington, who removed his hand from the package to accept the handshake.



James was nearing the close of his brief address to the gathering of surprised guests, who exchanged looks of bewilderment or engaged in whispers aside, in disbelief that a wedding such as this could be called off so abruptly. Doing his best to disguise his disquiet, James managed to muster a smile. 'So, when our groom's unexpected indisposition is resolved—and hopefully soon—you will be advised of the new arrangements for the nuptials.'

'Naturally, we regret any inconvenience,' James soldiered on, 'although, as friends, I trust you will understand what a disappointment this is. Indeed, I'm sure, for all of you.' His audience remained unresponsive, unsure how to react.

Wishing a hole would appear and swallow him up, James came to a decision. It would be one he would live to regret. 'As you may have gathered, a fitting repast has been prepared,' he announced. 'So, there is no good reason why you ought not to remain. Partake of what awaits. I am sure this is what the bride and groom would wish.'

Guests eyed each other, murmuring among themselves and deciding whether to leave or stay. With no more ammunition in sight, James concluded, 'There are now some matters requiring my attention. Though I shall be rejoining you shortly.'

As James emerged from the room he was collared by an anxious Brian Weston. 'What has happened to George, sir? Has he taken ill?'

James shook his head. 'That's just it. We don't know what has delayed him.' Then clutching at straws, he asked, 'You're his friend. Have you an idea what might have happened?'

The best man was none the wiser. 'All I know is that he adored your daughter. He made it clear this was going to be the best day of his life.'

James found Malcolm Sedgewick waiting in the entrance hall. He had just returned from talking to Eliza. 'It's most strange. She seems to have slipped into a state of denial,' he said.

'What do you mean by that?' asked James, further alarmed. Malcolm Sedgewick chose his language carefully, hoping to put the best face on the situation, if indeed, that were possible.

'Eliza is not really accepting what has happened. She simply believes there is no problem. That George will walk in the door at any time. Fortunately, she has Vicky, who is doing her best to help her.'

James was more bewildered than ever. Sedgewick was prompted to add, 'Shock can take many forms, James. In time she will understand exactly what has happened.'

James glanced about, overwhelmed by a feeling of helplessness and wondering what he should do. 'The guests are now settled,' he breathed. 'I should be with Eliza.'

At that moment Eliza appeared, in her wedding gown, trailed by an anxious-looking Vicky. She looked about calmly. 'Where is everyone, Papa? Have they left for the church?'

James glanced to Sedgewick, as if seeking an appropriate response. 'Don't concern yourself, my child. The guests are being looked after.'

Eliza paused, then looked towards the long dining room from where muted conversations and some quiet laughter could be heard. She turned back to her father. 'Papa. What is going on?'

Eliza saw her father's discomfort and turned back to the source of the sounds. 'Oh, no' she cried. 'It can't be.' She hurried towards the room.

In near panic, James called after her, 'No, Eliza! It's best you stay here.' He turned to Sedgewick and Vicky who looked equally alarmed. 'I must go,' he said and hurried off in his daughter's wake.

Amid the sounds of clinking cutlery, popping corks and related sounds of banquet activity, those guests who had decided to remain were chatting, mostly concerning the astounding change in their day. Conversations trailed to a halt as, one by one, the guests noticed Eliza, in full bridal attire, in the doorway.

Wide-eyed with disbelief, Eliza finally found her voice. 'Stop this! Don't touch anything! Leave things as they are!' she commanded. The startled guests and serving staff froze as one. Everything came to a stop.

Eliza spread her arms as if to embrace the room. 'Don't you understand? All this ... it's for after the ceremony. You must leave immediately.'

James appeared beside his daughter. Eliza told him, 'Papa, make them leave. Don't you see? We must wait for George!'

In quiet desperation, James pleaded with her, trying to ignore the stunned audience. 'Eliza we should go. Everything will be all right. You'll see.'

Eliza ignored his plea. 'How could you permit this?'

The guests began pushing back chairs, rising to their feet, stunned, speechless and more bewildered than ever. They nervously streamed past the glaring Eliza and a distressed James, avoiding looking at them.

When the room had emptied, Eliza declared, 'Now we lock the doors! They must remain secured until we return from the church!'

James and Eliza were joined by Sedgewick and Vicky. Eliza ignored them. 'I said lock the doors!' Eliza repeated, in growing anger.

James hesitated, then nodded. 'As you wish, my child. We shall lock the room.'

Vicky took Eliza gently by the arm. 'Let's go upstairs,' she said brightly. 'What if George should arrive? He is not supposed to see his lovely bride until we are all at the church.'

Eliza was suddenly calm. 'Of course. How foolish of me,' she said quietly. She looked back to James. 'Once the room is locked, please send all sets of keys to my room.'

James and Malcolm Sedgewick watched their respective daughters ascend the grand staircase in silence, conscious that the situation was slipping beyond their control. When the pair was lost to sight, James turned to his friend. 'What do we do now?'

Dr Sedgewick shrugged. 'We lock the doors.'



James waited anxiously by Eliza's door. He looked gaunt and weary and his face had lost much of its colour. The strain of recent events was catching up. After what had seemed an eternity, Malcolm Sedgewick emerged, closing the door quietly behind him. 'How is she?' James asked.

Sedgewick stroked at some stubble on his chin. 'I have sedated her. Eliza should sleep through into tomorrow. Perhaps a deep slumber may do the trick.' He looked closely at James. 'You're not well. Are you?'

James tried to shrug away cause for concern. 'It's nothing, really, I just need a bit of rest.' He did not fool the doctor.

'Are you in pain?' Sedgewick persisted.

'Just a twinge. Probably a touch of wind,' James answered.

'And just where is this twinge?'

James hunched his shoulders, realising there was no place to hide. 'If you must know ... it's my chest. As I said. Just wind.'

Sedgewick shook his head, as if dealing with a difficult child. 'It looks like I have a second patient on my hands.'

Farther down the hallway, out of sight but within hearing, Vashi quietly asked himself, 'What have I done ? It was not supposed to be like this!' He glanced about, in desperation, as if he could perhaps will things to be put to rights. But he realised it was now too late for that.

Chapter Thirteen

Thomas was away with the carriage, getting the horses shod at the blacksmith's shop at the Cooks River end of King Street. Gordon was trimming hedges. He was distracted by the appearance of Vashi, who had emerged from the trades entrance at the rear of the house. James Donnithorne's personal assistant glanced about, as if to satisfy himself that nobody was around before moving towards the stables. His curiosity aroused, Gordon ducked behind the hedge to avoid being seen. There was something odd about Vashi's demeanor, quite apart from the fact that he seldom went near the stables unless he had something to complain about.

At the stable entrance, Vashi paused again and looked about before he entered. He headed for the dim saddlery room. With its aroma of chaff, straw and leather, it offered its own special atmosphere of serenity, undisturbed by anything more than the odd soft snorting of a horse from the nearby stalls.

Vashi found what he was looking for in a corner of the room. A collection of reins, bridles, straps and ropes dangled from hooks screwed into the timber wall. Propped nearby was a long-handled scythe with a curved scimitar-like blade. Vashi picked up a grooming stool and placed it on the saddlery room's long table.

Clasping a length of rope which he had selected from the hooks, Vashi clambered awkwardly onto the table. He looked incongruous in his immaculate business suit and highly polished black leather shoes.

By standing on the stool, he could just reach up to an overhead beam, which he looped the rope around.

Without really understanding why, Gordon found himself slowly approaching the stables. He had a gut feeling that something was afoot. He came to a halt. Was it really his business? he asked himself. After all, Vashi could be someone best avoided.

Still perched on the stool on the table, Vashi fashioned the rope into a noose, secured by a knot. He took a deep breath and steeled himself, then slipped the noose over his head. He was convinced that this was the only honourable way to resolve the shame and calamity he had visited upon his master and the household. But he started to shake. He looked up to the ceiling where a crack in the sloping timber allowed in a faint shaft of sunlight that speared the dimness, a symbol of the world outside. It calmed him. He knew it would be the last thing he would see.

With the polished shoes beneath the cuffs of his precisely pressed trousers kicked in unison, the little stool crashed from the table to the straw-littered floor.

Gordon entered the saddlery room and in the gloom found the suspended figure, its legs kicking and thrashing as though an unseen puppeteer was toying with the rope binding him.

Acting on instinct and without thought, Gordon grabbed the scythe and leaped to the dangling body. He reached up and swung the curved blade at the rope.



Malcolm Sedgewick opened the door in response to a frantic hammering. Gordon and Thomas were on the steps, supporting the limp form of a lifeless-looking man, whose head hung downwards.

'Bring him inside and follow me,' the doctor commanded, leading the way to his treatment room. It was not until James's two servants

had laid the man on the table that Dr Sedgewick recognised him. 'What on earth has happened?' he demanded.

Gordon and Thomas, almost out of breath from struggling to carry Vashi from Camperdown Lodge, exchanged glances. Thomas was first to find his voice. 'Tried to hang himself, he did!'

'Looks like he might have succeeded,' Gordon chimed in.

Malcolm Sedgewick pushed Vashi's head back and traced with his fingers an angry red welt that had been carved into the victim's throat. He was not sure whether the patient was dead or alive. He bent down and placed an ear close to Vashi's face, listening for any indication of breathing. After several seconds, he raised his head and said, 'Leave him here. I'll see what I can do.'

Thomas hesitated, 'Is he dead?'

Sedgewick was working on his unresponsive patient. 'Not a word of this. To anyone,' he ordered. 'Understand?'

Mindful of James's frail condition, Malcolm decided that he should be shielded from what had occurred for as long as was possible. Thomas and Gordon took their leave with their question unanswered.



The small, three-masted trading barque *Betty Blythe* ploughed through the swell under full sail, taking advantage of a near following wind. First Mate Harry Briggs cast a final look about the aft deck and, satisfied that all appeared well, clambered down a companionway. With the Australian coast now a distant line off the starboard side, he decided the time had arrived to follow the captain's special, albeit unusual, orders. Briggs stopped at a cabin door, produced a large key and used it to unlock a padlock, then slid back a heavy bolt. With a perfunctory rap on the door, Briggs pushed it open and stepped inside.

George Cuthbertson sat on the side of a bunk in the cramped quarters, which had one dinnerplate-sized porthole. 'Good morning, sir,' Briggs said to the cabin's sole occupant.

Cuthbertson fixed the first mate in a hostile glare. 'What might be good about it, Mr Briggs?'

Briggs smiled broadly. 'We've cleared the coast, Mr Cuthbertson. You now have the freedom of the ship,' he announced.

From his perch on the bunk Cuthbertson was angered almost as much by the officer's cheerfulness as he was by his present predicament. 'Freedom! I've been kidnapped.'

Briggs was unruffled. 'So you say. Though I wouldn't know about that.' He added, 'But I do know that your passage has been paid and a ticket issued in your name. And you'll be pleased to know that your luggage has been stored safely.'

'I was drugged. And dragged aboard against my wishes. You must be aware of this,' Cuthbertson exploded.

Briggs shrugged, remaining cool and unimpressed. 'Drugged, you say? We were told you'd had a few too many. And your friends had to help you aboard.'

Cuthbertson shook his head dismissively. 'Then why have I been imprisoned these past days? Answer that!'

Briggs adopted a patronising expression. 'We were told you might do yourself some harm. Like trying to swim home.'

Cuthbertson felt more trapped than ever. He was getting nowhere with the smiling big bear of a man who had been his jailer. 'I demand to see the captain!' he said.

Briggs grinned. 'Oh, you'll be doing that all right. You're the only passenger on this little tub. We all mess together.' He paused to let his words sink in for the clearly distressed young man. 'Now, if you need anything, you'll mostly find me on deck. And the head's at the end of the passage forward.'

Long after Briggs had departed, George sat, trying to grasp his

situation. It looked as though he had been well and truly stitched up. And he was almost certain who had been responsible. To think that Eliza's father had gone through the motions of making everyone think he had been accepted into the family. George shook his head. That was lawyers for you, he told himself. Then it struck him. In his indignation he had forgotten to ask where he was being taken. Then again, did it make any difference?



Malcolm's suspected diagnosis proved correct. Vashi had been knocked unconscious in his fall after being cut down by Gordon and, as a result, had been slightly concussed. Although his neck and throat were swollen, he would survive, albeit with a sore throat and hoarse voice, the legacy of a bruised larynx.

The following morning the doctor went downstairs and checked Vashi's condition. 'Do you want to tell me about it?' he asked.

Vashi considered, then inclined his head. 'Not really,' he rasped. 'Because of what I've done, I don't deserve to live.'

Malcolm Sedgewick shrugged. 'Well, Vashi, you will live. And you need to consider your future.'

Vashi looked up from the bed. 'Any future I might have will need to be elsewhere. I can't remain here.'

The response reinforced Malcolm's suspicions that the attempted suicide was in some way connected to the aborted wedding, although just how eluded him. 'If you leave, it will be a blow to Mr Donnithorne. Especially in his present condition,' he said. 'You have undertaken many of his burdens and he respects you.'

'He can't respect me after what I have done,' Vashi responded.

As concerned about the condition of his friend James as that of his present patient, Malcolm Sedgewick made one more attempt to pacify Vashi. 'I understand you have been with him since you were

a youth. And it's clear Mr Donnithorne regards you as part of the family.'

Malcolm Sedgewick lapsed into silence. There seemed little else to be said. And Vashi had evidently made up his mind to leave. The patient eased himself from the bed and clambered stiffly to his feet. 'I shall return to Camperdown Lodge now. For the last time. Just to gather a few belongings,' he croaked.

Later that morning Malcolm paid a call on James. He dreaded the possibility of having to discuss Vashi's situation. He prayed Thomas and Gordon had kept their silence as instructed.

James was sitting in an easy chair by the bedroom window. He looked pale and tired. 'How do you feel today?' Malcolm asked in what he hoped was a cheerful voice.

James raised a wry smile. 'As well as can be expected.'

After Malcolm had conducted a series of routine examinations, James asked, 'And how is Eliza?'

Malcolm snapped the bag shut. 'Your daughter is next on my list. Yesterday she was calm and collected, although ...'

James finished for him. '... although still in denial?'

Malcolm nodded. 'I'm afraid so. However, her general demeanour looks like a promising sign.' He hoped he made it sound optimistic. As he was about to leave the room, James had another question One which was not easy to field. 'What's happened to Vashi?'

Before Malcolm could attempt a response, James added, 'I have been waiting to see him since early yesterday. Nobody seems to know where he is. Most strange.'

Malcolm sat down and laid his bag aside. He needed to choose his words carefully. He was fearful of the effect of what he was obliged to say on James. At least it was evident that Gordon and Thomas had remained silent about what had happened in the stables.

'Vashi seems to blame himself for what happened. The wedding. The absent groom. And Eliza's condition,' he began.

James was bewildered. 'Why on earth would he feel so?'

Malcolm groped for a suitable response, one that would not be too harsh. James read his body language with growing suspicion. Malcolm shrugged, then bit the bullet. 'James, my friend,' he said, 'Vashi has gone. He's not coming back.'

'Gone? But why?'

James listened in silence to what Malcolm had to say; at first in disbelief, then with growing distress that Vashi could have betrayed his trust and crushed his daughter's happiness. Equally distressing was that he would never again set eyes on the man who meant so much to him. His sense of loss was greater than anyone could imagine.

A long silence descended on the pair. James suddenly looked much older. Malcolm did not like what he saw.

Eventually, James licked at his cracked lips and looked to Malcolm with eyes now dulled. He offered an arm to his friend. 'Help me, Malcolm,' he said in a quiet voice. 'I think it is time I rested.'

Malcolm rose from the bed and took James by the arm. 'Of course, dear friend. That sounds like a good idea.'



Elizabeth listened quietly and without comment as Thomas recounted what had led to Vashi's sudden departure, including his suicide attempt in the stables. 'I know I'm not supposed to tell anyone,' he concluded, 'but I just couldn't keep it to myself much longer. And you seemed to be the best one to tell, Miss Elizabeth.'

Elizabeth, along with the rest of the household, had heard the news of Vashi's departure with a mix of relief, even delight, and curiosity, and she had suspected there had to be much more to it. And most probably related in some way to recent events. 'I can understand how knowing this must have been difficult for you,' she said. 'But what about Gordon, who saved Vashi's life?'

‘Oh, he feels the same as myself. Reckoned we oughta get it off our chests, like they say.’

‘Then I suggest now you both put it all behind you,’ Elizabeth told him, ‘because of Miss Eliza’s state, and what with the Master being unwell. It’s best such matters remain with us. And no one else.’

Thomas looked relieved to have clearly selected the best person in whom to confide. He had always respected Elizabeth for her cool head and common sense.

Well after Thomas had returned to the stables, she sat in the deserted servants’ station, replaying everything that Thomas had revealed. But there still remained the question of how Vashi arranged for George Cuthbertson to miss his own wedding. Had he been bribed, or intimidated in some manner, she asked herself. She decided probably not. The young man was clearly smitten by her mistress and adored her, not the trappings of money, comfort and security which would have resulted from the union. Elizabeth thought about the report that Cuthbertson had quit his lodgings and left with a group of male friends. That somehow seemed to be the key to it all. They might not have been friends. And if not, what was their involvement and how did it come about? And if a third party was involved, then it most probably would have been Vashi. Why else would he blame himself and exhibit such remorse? The only mystery that still remained was where had Cuthbertson been taken? And was he still alive? She shook her head trying to come to terms with the tangled web.

Elizabeth knew that whatever had happened recently paled in comparison with new events. The master was now ill and confined to his quarters, Eliza was bewildered and in a state of denial, in no state to guide the household, its organisation and staff. In effect, Camperdown Lodge was now like a rudderless ship. Something needed to be done to meet the crisis.

Elizabeth decided to hopefully buy time. She would enlist the help of Margaret, who in effect had been acting as housekeeper following

the departure of the long-gone Ann Kelly. Together with Sarah, the trio would work to keep the household functioning until the master recovered and Eliza was restored to health. A meeting of staff would be called as a matter of priority to establish the arrangement and, in some cases, reallocate responsibilities.



The day had dawned bright and sunny. Dr Sedgewick, his trademark bag in hand, strolled up the driveway of Camperdown Lodge, as he had done for the past three weeks, to pay a daily visit to James. It was clear that James had suffered a moderate heart attack and would need to take things easy for some time.

Sedgewick's attention was taken by Eliza. Dressed in a broad-brimmed straw hat and loose sunfrock, she had set up an easel and paints by the large fountain. He knew that Eliza had enjoyed painting as a child, and took her rekindled interest as perhaps a good sign. At least, he hoped so.

He came to a stop and watched Eliza, who was engrossed in capturing birds splashing and playing about the fountain on canvas. Sedgewick smiled indulgently, having noted that she looked calm and at peace, seemingly without a care in the world. Eliza was unaware of his presence until his shadow fell upon the paving stones beside her. 'Oh, good morning, doctor,' she smiled.

'I take it the light must be good this morning,' he said.

Eliza nodded. 'This time of day is best. Only the birds don't always cooperate.'

'Well, birds will be birds, I suppose,' Sedgewick chuckled.

'And what brings you by today,' Eliza asked.

Malcolm tried to conceal his disappointment at the question. 'You, er, might recall, Eliza,' he began gently, 'I have been visiting your father every day.'

Eliza considered for a few moments. 'Of course. Papa has been confined upstairs for ages.'

'It's his heart, Eliza, so it's now a matter of ensuring we do not have another attack,' Sedgewick explained.

Eliza put aside her brush. 'Papa worries about his work so much. Despite what I tell him.'

Sedgewick was unsure of what she meant. 'What do you, er, tell him?'

'With Vashi gone, Papa frets about things. He hates handing matters over to his accountant.'

Sedgewick tried to get her back on track. 'You mentioned something about what you tell your father,' he prompted.

'Oh yes,' Eliza responded. 'I keep telling him not to worry. When George arrives he will sort things out for Papa. Just as they agreed.'

Malcolm Sedgewick forced a smile, to veil his dismay. 'I see,' he murmured, mostly to himself.

Eliza picked up her brush and beamed one of her dazzling smiles. 'I don't know what can be keeping George. But he ought to be here soon.' As though Sedgewick were not present she went back to her painting, concerned only about her chirping, fluttering and active subjects by the fountain.

Chapter Fourteen

As usual, the Bombay waterfront was bustling. Cargo was moved on and off barges which nosed about the crush of vessels of all sizes and rigs that were anchored in the stream, having missed out on a berth along the packed wharves. Dockworkers, many stripped to the waist, toiled at open hatches or manhandled crates as they were lowered to the dockside to be loaded onto wooden trolleys.

One group of workers bent low as they pushed around the arms of a reluctant and slowly revolving windlass to haul on a steel hawser, which emerged dripping from the water, quivering in its tautness as it took up the strain. At its source the steel cable slid snakelike from an open port of a small trading vessel. The *Betty Blythe* had reached its destination.

George Cuthbertson gazed down on the press of bodies and frenetic activity on the wharf below. It was an eclectic gathering of labourers, bearded, turbaned sheikhs, porters in flowing and loose robes, peddlers of food and drinks, others in motley and ill-fitting western clothes.

George was joined by First Mate Briggs. 'Well, Mr Cuthbertson. It's journey's end,' he said.

George turned to Briggs. 'Not for me, Mr Briggs. I'm on the next ship back to Sydney.'

The mate raised an eyebrow, assumed surprise. 'Really. And how might you be doing that?'

'I'll manage. First stop will be the British Embassy. To report my kidnapping, imprisonment and the involvement of this vessel and its crew,' George said.

Briggs grinned and pointed down towards the wharf. 'Might be an idea to find out what that chap might have to say first.' George looked down to the jostling humanity on the dock, unsure what Briggs was talking about. At the foot of the narrow gangplank was a middle-aged Indian male, dressed in loose trousers, a cream jacket that had seen better days, a loosely knotted tie and a crumpled Panama. He held up a scribbled sign that read 'Mr Cuthbertson'.

George looked back at Briggs in the hope of getting a clue who or what the man represented. The first mate had moved off to supervise some workers about to knock out the wooden pegs holding down the forward hatch.

George pushed his way against a stream of workers clambering up the spindly, twitching gangplank and went over to the man with the sign. He was greeted warmly. 'Welcome to Bombay, Mr Cuthbertson, sir. I am Mukesh Utam. At your service!'

George got straight down to business. 'In that case Mr, er, Mukesh, take me to the British Embassy.'

Mukesh continued to smile. 'Of course, sir. But I believe the embassy you seek is located in Calcutta. Or is it Delhi? No matter, there is a consul here in Bombay.'

'Then please take me to the British consulate,' George said, starting to think he might be about to get the run around.

'Very well, sir. But first you had better meet Mr McKenzie. Hear what he has to say.'

'And who is he?' George asked, more suspicious than ever.

'Oh, he is very nice man. Mr McKenzie will tell you much good news,' Mukesh replied enthusiastically.

George hesitated. Perhaps this McKenzie man could throw some light on what was going on. In any case, he did not seem to have much

alternative. Mukesh studied his reaction and seemed to sense what George was thinking. He prompted, "There's a vehicle waiting, Mr Cuthbertson. I will see to it that your luggage is loaded safely. We can go to the consul later, eh?" George still hesitated. Mukesh added, 'Please, sir. Mr McKenzie expects you. He is very nice man.'

George, Mukesh and a turbaned driver crowded into a small, rattling buggy with an umbrella-like awning. It was pulled along the crowded streets by a weary little horse at a slowly plodding pace.

George tried to take in the passing scene: vendors; beggars, many just children, some missing an eye, an arm, leg or hand; snake charmers squatted before round baskets blowing on flutes; colourful stalls; people peddling food and drinks; veiled women; children splashing and shouting in rubbish-choked, muddy monsoon drains; scampering skinny dogs with corrugated ribs; monkeys and baboons chained to posts, parrots screeching in cages.

Their buggy was halted at a cross street to permit a long line of marching British soldiers in pith helmets, rifles at their shoulders and bandoliers of ammunition angled across their white tunics to pass by.

George pointed to the troops. 'Why all the soldiers, Mukesh?'

Mukesh adopted a serious manner. "There is much trouble up country, sir. Very bad men! They want to throw we British out."

They came to a stop at a modest two-storey building in a narrow side street. The sign outside proclaimed it the home of the Anglo-India Shipping Company. As George climbed out of the buggy, Mukesh volunteered, 'I will attend to your bag, Mr Cuthbertson. Then we go and see Mr McKenzie. He is ...'

'Yes, a very nice man,' George completed for him.



Jack McKenzie *was* an amiable man, about sixty, whose accent had been softened by many years away from the Scottish Highlands.

The papers on his cluttered desk were ruffled from the draft of a squeaking bamboo ceiling fan. George had a great many questions for the local manager of the Anglo-India Shipping Company, but he was momentarily distracted by the fan, wondering just how it might have been powered.

'I can understand you being upset, Mr Cuthbertson, but as I have told you, laddie, your indenture to this company is legally binding,' said McKenzie. 'You cannot leave for the next three years. To break it would mean imprisonment. The law is strict about this.'

George was indignant. 'But I have signed no papers. And as I have told you, I am to be married. My fiancée is waiting for me in Sydney!'

McKenzie nodded in sympathy. 'I believe you, lad. And it's clear someone wanted you removed. Perhaps to ensure you didn't wed your lassie?'

'I have considered that,' George conceded quietly.

McKenzie leaned back in his chair and spread his hands in a gesture of helplessness. George's predicament was not of his doing. 'Was it the work of the lady's father?' he asked.

George shrugged. 'Eliza's father never really approved of me. I was a clerk, and their family was ...'

McKenzie leaned forward. 'What? Because you were below their station?'

'Yes, I suppose, in truth, Mr McKenzie, I was below their class.'

McKenzie adopted an air of confidentiality. 'Look, laddie,' he began, 'this is the land of opportunity. Play your cards right. Do a good job. Head down and arse up. Keep off the gin, and like it's said, the world is one's oyster!'

'But, what about my fiancée?'

McKenzie inclined his head in a dismissive gesture. 'Forget about class. And people's station. It's money that counts. If you have the means, all doors are opened. Believe me, lad!'

George tried to come to terms with his position. McKenzie knew he had triggered the young man's interest and broke the silence. 'If this Eliza of yours truly loves you, she will wait for you to return. In, say, three years, with your pockets lined with gold. Then there will be no more nonsense like what station you are supposed to belong to.'

George looked up in growing interest.

McKenzie concluded his advice. 'You'll be a success, lad. And that's what really counts, no matter what!'

The seed had been planted. 'You could have a point, Mr McKenzie,' George said. 'But how can I be sure that ...'

McKenzie cut him short. 'This company is expanding, George lad. Besides shipping, we're going into spices, fine cotton, silks and semi-precious stones. Furniture, even. There's growing demand, back in England and on the continent.' McKenzie paused, before adding, 'Perhaps I should mention that we are presently looking for someone to look after the acquisitions side of things. Someone young and ambitious. And with motivation!'

George raised a slow, reflective smile. Jack McKenzie was no mean salesman. The manager of Anglo-India Shipping decided it was time to drive home the last nail. 'Could be your enemies might have done you a favour. And that would be the sweetest kind of vengeance, eh?' he added slyly.

Turning it over in his mind, George looked up at the blades churning above their heads. McKenzie followed his gaze. 'That,' he said, 'is a monument to Scottish ingenuity. All we Scots are engineers at heart,' he chuckled.

George was more curious than ever. McKenzie was only too pleased to explain the secret of something that aroused the interest of most people who entered his office. 'On the roof we have some sails that turn a shaft in the wind. Through a reduction gear wheel, the shaft comes down through the ceiling to turn the blades. Very simple, lad!'

Although impressed, George was moved to ask, 'What happens when there is no wind?'

'Then this office is very hot and uncomfortable,' McKenzie replied with a broad smile. George decided that he liked the amiable old Scot who, he suspected, would charm a bird out of a tree if such would suit his purposes.



James slowly descended the stairs with the aid of an ebony walking stick and of Angela. At the bottom he paused to catch his breath. 'Thank you. I shall be all right now, Angela,' he said.

Angela shyly curtsied. 'It is nice to see you out again, sir.'

James did feel pleased to be rejoining the mainstream of life. He glanced about, taking in the familiar surroundings, when his attention was drawn to the entrance chamber. He turned to Angela. 'Someone has left the doors open,' he asked, adding, 'and what is that lamp doing there?' James was referring to an unlit lantern on the tiles just inside the open doors.

Angela smiled reassuringly. 'Oh, Miss Eliza wants it that way, sir.'

'Why would she wish that? And why has the lantern been left there?' he persisted.

Angela appeared to be uncomfortable, not really sure of being able to provide a rational explanation. 'I, er, am not really sure, sir,' she fumbled. She made a discreet exit as James continued to gaze at the partially open doors and unlit lamp.

James crossed to the entrance and prodded at the lantern with his walking stick, as though it might provoke some sort of response. He was unaware of the arrival of Eliza. She stopped beside him. 'There you are, Papa. In time for supper.'

James swung around and pointed his stick at the entrance way. 'Eliza, why are the doors open. It's getting rather late.'

Eliza took him by the arm 'It's that way every night, Papa,' she said casually.

'Every night. But why?' James demanded.

Eliza appeared surprised by his concern. With an indulgent shake of her head she told her father, 'For George, of course. The lantern is lit each night before we retire. To let him know he is expected.'

James leaned heavily on his walking stick. He found himself breathing heavily as he tried to cope with a wave of distress that threatened to overwhelm him. A chill had suddenly replaced the warmth of his return to the world of Camperdown Lodge.

Oblivious to her father's reaction, Eliza smiled brightly and said, 'Here, take my arm, Papa. Supper is waiting. It is good to see you downstairs again.'

The long night that was to descend upon Camperdown Lodge had begun. Most had thought that James's recovery would mean things got back to normal. And for the next seven years it would be almost so, albeit tempered by Eliza's lingering emotional state.



Now in his mid-seventies, James had reluctantly accepted that the challenge of controlling his business empire would impose too great a burden, especially since he no longer had the support of Vashi Larkman and he was not in the best of health. So he sold some of his properties, including a selection of residences in the city's Rocks district, the area where George Cuthbertson had lived. One of his most valuable holdings retained would play a significant role in a horrific chapter of Australia's maritime history, although by then James had been laid to rest in the cemetery of St Stephen's. It would be his daughter who would be confronted by the event.

Eliza continued to wait for her beloved George, and she had begun collecting rare books and first editions. Once the word had spread

among the country's book dealers, many made the pilgrimage to Camperdown Lodge, peddling special editions and collectable works to the daughter of the English judge. Few were turned away. James had hoped that Eliza's involvement in good books would help her get over George and repair her emotional state. It was a forlorn hope.

Although James had successfully persuaded Eliza to accept that the main doors ought to be locked each night, on the undertaking that George would be warmly welcomed upon arrival, his daughter was steadfast in her demand that the long dining room would remain locked with the wedding feast untouched and that she was the sole custodian of the keys. Their social life had shrunk. Visitors were restricted to Malcolm Sedgewick, Vicky and some close family friends, included John G. Gibbes, collector of customs, and the surgeon William Bland, who, together with the Reverend Kemp, would become James's executors and trustees.

Even though the emotional challenge it involved became an increasing burden, Vicky visited Eliza several times a week, but most conversations turned to George and plans for his imminent return.



In Bengal, George Cuthbertson had written a number of letters to Eliza, to confirm that he loved her, that he was alive and well, and would be in a position to support her in his own right once his term with Anglo-India Shipping was concluded.

But some of the letters were never finished, and those that were were discarded rather than consigned to the mail service. Increasingly, George dreaded that Eliza's response would reveal that she had found a new love. Not only did he come to fear such news, he expected it.

And in truth, other matters had gradually altered George's feelings. He had found rewards and success for his efforts with Anglo-India, thus confirming the expectations of Jack McKenzie, who had

become a father-like influence. And despite telling himself that one day he would leave to claim his bride, India itself had exerted its own seductive fascination and influence upon George's life. It had also become his home, his work and the source of his success. And in its own way, India had become his love.



In the winter of 1852 James took a turn for the worse. On Malcolm Sedgewick's advice, he was encouraged to ensure that his will and related matters were in order. As a result, on the morning of 1 May, a revised last will and testament was drawn up. The executors and trustees arrived at Camperdown Lodge to be formally appointed, and the will was witnessed by Rob Johnson, William Billyard and John T. Gannon.

Various bequests were established, including to his sons in England, some retainers who included Charles Vashi Larkman—whereabouts unknown, and Ann Kelly, former wife of St Agnes's William, whose young son James was to receive an annuity from a trust for his support and education. The remainder of the estate went to Eliza as the main beneficiary.

Once the will had been executed and those involved had taken their leave, James asked Malcolm to remain. He sank back on the pillows and looked weary. The event had carried its own melancholy message. The doctor took a seat by the bed and smiled. 'Well, that's a burden settled now, James,' he said, doing his best to sound cheerful.

But James had something else on his mind. There was an awkward silence while he considered how best he should proceed.

'I believe the time has come for me to tell someone,' he began. 'Something I have lived with for a long time. I suppose one could say it is my dark secret.' He paused and with a faint smile, added, 'I suppose we all have one.'

Malcolm waited in silence.

In a laboured delivery, James pressed on. 'As you would be aware, Malcolm, life for a young man on the sub-continent, well, it has its temptations. There was a young woman ...'

Malcolm softly intoned. 'You ought to rest, James. Don't fret about things long past.'

James shook his head. 'Please. Hear me out. The young woman was beautiful. And I was besotted. Infatuated. And I was also a married man with position in society.'

'It's as you said, James. We all have things in our past. And it's been a trying morning for you.'

James shrugged. 'I shan't have too many mornings left, I'm afraid,' he breathed. 'And, you see, what I have to say is not really in the past. There was a child of the union. A boy. Vashi ... was my son. He never knew who his father was. It was supposed to be better that way. Or was it?'

Malcolm Sedgewick was stunned. James's revelation clarified a number of things. Such as why James had been so indulgent of Vashi's often difficult relationships in the household; why he had been given positions of trust and authority and controlled the money in James's business empire; why, despite his involvement in George Cuthbertson's disappearance, he had been bequeathed the equivalent of three years' salary in the will just executed.

James seemed to read what had been passing through Malcolm's mind. 'Just imagine,' he said quietly, 'Eliza never knew she had a half brother.'



Twenty-four days later, on 25 May 1852, James passed away. He was seventy-nine. Eliza was just twenty-six. Many wondered what the future might hold for her.

The funeral was held on a grey, drizzling day. Many carriages were parked in a long line outside the grounds of St Stephen's. Mourners gathered about the open grave beneath a sea of umbrellas. Bishop William Broughton officiated. Reverend Kemp stood beside him, holding aloft an umbrella to shelter them both.

Eliza, her face obscured by a dark veil draped from her black bonnet, was flanked by Malcolm Sedgewick and Vicky. The bishop intoned, 'And so we now commit our brother to the earth. In certain knowledge that when the trumpets sound on Judgement Day, the graves shall surrender up their dead. To be raised, in the glory and love of the Lord.' Vicky reached out to squeeze Eliza's arm and smiled reassuringly. Eliza stared ahead without reaction.

Above the soft whisper of the drizzling rain the sound of the two gravediggers' shovels squelched into the mound of wet soil heaped by the open grave. They lifted then tilted their loads into the wounded earth, to thump upon the casket below. Bishop Broughton announced, 'Ashes to ashes. Dust to dust.'



Her father's passing was a serious blow for Eliza. James had been her strength and her security.

Then she received a second blow.

For some time Vicky had been agonising that sooner or later she would have to give Eliza some more devastating news. Vicky had kept postponing the conversation—and procrastination was not her usual approach to life's challenges. Finally, steadying her resolve, she decided the time was now, whatever Eliza's emotional state.

Eliza listened impassively to what Vicky had to say.

'As you know, Father has now retired from practice. And since Mont Eagle House is rather large for just the two of us, he has bought a smaller home in Windsor on the Hawkesbury River.'

Vicky went on. 'Father has always liked living in the countryside since his days in India,' she smiled.

She paused. There was no reaction from her friend. Vicky had no option but to state the obvious. 'It won't be like our living next door to each other, dearest Eliza, so I probably will not be able to visit quite as much as I should wish.'

Eliza stared ahead bleakly, silent and apparently unmoved. Vicky faltered, knowing that she would not be able to go on and explain that she had fallen in love with a man she was shortly to wed, and that he was a landholder in the Windsor area.

Vicky knew that Eliza was certain that George would arrive to claim her as a bride one day. She could not bring herself to tell Eliza about her own marriage, and nor could she shrug away the feeling of guilt about keeping such news from her closest friend, even though she knew it was the most compassionate thing to do.

Long after Vicky had left, Eliza remained seated in the small sun room where they had talked. Then Eliza's lips trembled and she bowed her head. Her shoulders shook as she surrendered to a bout of uncontrolled sobbing. The mask of indifference had collapsed. The news had sunk in that she had now lost the most important person left in her lonely world.



A month after James had been laid to rest Eliza called a meeting of the household's staff. The news was not good. Their young mistress had decided to let most of them go. Thomas would stay on and continue to live in the stablehands' quarters. Elizabeth and Sarah, who had lived at Camperdown Lodge since they were young girls, would continue to serve their mistress. The carriage would be kept, along with one horse. Severance payments were generous and references freely given to help them secure alternative employment.

The final chore for Gordon, assisted by Thomas, was to hammer shut the mansion's window shutters. The main gates were well secured too, although the small pedestrian entrance to one side remained accessible. Elizabeth and Sarah were kept busy heaving white dust covers into the air—they blossomed out like giant flowers to settle on tables, chairs, sofas and other items of furniture and were then taped into place.

The wedding banquet remained undisturbed, locked away in the long dining room, and the tall grandfather clock by the doors was permitted to run down, its pendulum stilled and the clacking away of the passing hours silenced.

Eliza would still welcome the odd bookseller and, on occasion, those who had fallen on hard times would present themselves, in response to her reputation for generosity and invariably they would depart with coins in their pockets.

Letters were received regularly from a concerned Edward and Penelope, urging Eliza to leave Camperdown Lodge for a new life at Twickenham. They were seldom responded to, and always in the negative.

Once again the main doors were left slightly ajar, secured by a chain. The lantern, lit afresh each night, served as both a guiding and welcoming beacon for the arrival of George Cuthbertson.

Night had settled upon Camperdown Lodge. It would not lift for thirty-five years.



Eighteen fifty-seven was to prove eventful for both Eliza and George Cuthbertson, though for vastly different reasons.

A wild storm swept in from the sea across Sydney on the night of Thursday 20 August, driven by gale-force easterly winds. Out to sea the clipper ship *Dunbar* approached the coast after a comparatively

swift eighty-one day voyage from Plymouth, England. Aboard the 1321-ton copper-sheathed, three-masted vessel were sixty-three passengers, fifty-nine crew and a mixed cargo which included fine goods, furniture, coins, cutlery, foodstuffs, alcohol and dyes intended for the colony's first postage stamps. Barely five years old, it would have been the ship's second visit to Sydney, and the eighth for its master Captain Green.

Rather than wait for morning, Captain Green and his crew decided to enter the harbour in the darkness. Green misread his position in the wild conditions and the *Dunbar* was driven onto a reef at Port Jackson's South Head. The impact brought down the topmasts, and the roaring seas stove in the lifeboats. Lying on its side, the doomed vessel began breaking up almost immediately. The only survivor, a young seaman named James Johnson, managed to secure a fingerhold when he was swept into the cliffs.

Scrambling higher, Johnson reached a tiny ledge above the wreck. When dawn came he found himself surrounded by wreckage and bodies. Johnson managed to climb higher above the reach of the mountainous waves and clung to the cliff until rescued, some thirty-six hours after the sinking.

The *Dunbar's* victims were so mutilated from being repeatedly dashed against the rocks, many could not be identified and floated about the cliffs and into the harbour itself, most in the vicinity of Watson's Bay. The authorities decided to establish a tent city morgue along the shoreline, but first required the permission of the landowner, Eliza Donnithorne.

Eliza readily agreed, and days later, when the unidentified dead were taken to a mass grave in St Stephen's Cemetery, the funeral procession passed by the gates of Camperdown Lodge. Military bands played Handel's Dead March from *Saul*, leading seven hearses and four mourning coaches, flanked by a guard of honour provided by the mounted police. More than twenty thousand people lined the

streets to witness the sad procession of the unknown dead on their journey to a final resting place.



One month before the *Dunbar* disaster, on the far side of the Indian Ocean, other dramas were taking place. On a humid July day in 1857 a spindly-looking locomotive puffed out dark clouds of smoke as it hauled a cavalcade of wooden coaches up an incline in the northern Indian countryside. The flat roofs were crowded with people squatting among the rolling luggage, bundles and baskets, cages of birds, poultry and even some small piglets.

The more fortunate and prosperous passengers in the coaches were unaware of the people above them. They relaxed on red leather seats beneath corked glass decanters of water in wall-mounted brass holders, whose contents had been chilled at the start of the journey some hours beforehand though were now of questionable appeal.

Dressed in cream tropical rig, George Cuthbertson took his eyes from the passing scenery to consult his fob watch. If the much-vaunted boast of the fledgling Indian Railways to always be on time, in the tradition of its British counterpart—a goal sometimes, but not always, achieved—now held true, he could expect to be in Akbarabad within the hour. It was to be a brief visit to the city of Agra to execute an agreement, then hopefully return to Bombay on the next train out. He played back in his mind the concerned words of Jack McKenzie. ‘Do you think it’s wise, lad? The situation with the mutineers looks nasty in the north.’

George smiled as he recalled his flippant response to the fatherly old Scot. ‘We need that contract ratified, Mac. I’ll be there and back before you know it.’

His confidence had earned him McKenzie’s established advice, no matter the issue. ‘Then make it quick. And watch your arse.’

Jack McKenzie's concern had been well founded. India had become a tense land since the mutiny of sepoys of the British East India's army on 10 May in Meerut. That had soon erupted into other mutinies and civilian rebellions, mostly in the central and northern regions. While discontent had simmered beneath the surface for some years, usually the appearance of regular military units seconded from England had been sufficient to calm the situation.

The worsening situation now had prompted the recall of some regiments and had resulted in Edward's Lancers unit being based at the Red Fort in Agra. Delhi had been overrun by mutineering sepoys and civilian rebels, though it would be retaken in September. It would not be until the latter period of 1858, however, before the Indian Mutiny, as it was generally known, would be put to rest.

Throughout the conflict, Bombay and Madras had remained relatively calm. This had given many the false impression that perhaps things were not really so serious, and had probably influenced George Cuthbertson's decision to undertake his business mission.

Just over an hour later the train slowed, amid growing clouds of steam, and with a few shrills of its whistle announced the end of the journey at a crowded platform. The station sign proclaimed:

Agra Fort Railway Station [Akbarabad]

Gripping a small case, George pushed his way through the jostling crowd on the station, much like swimming against a human tide, who were intent on boarding the train from which he had just alighted. He approached the exit gates that were manned by four British soldiers under the command of a sergeant, who was attempting to impose some sort of order on the arriving hordes.

As George edged his way through the opposing tide he caught the eye of the sergeant. 'Oi, there! Where do you think you're going?' he called.

George turned and called over the bobbing heads, 'I'm here on business. What's the problem?'

The sergeant shoved aside those in his way and made his way over to George. 'Sorry . Nobody's doing business today. The place's under seige. We're turning people back and helping others get out.'

After coming so far and being so close to his destination, George stood his ground. The tall sergeant towered over him. 'It's back into the station, sir.'

An English couple with two small children buttonholed the sergeant, seeking information. George decided to take advantage of him being distracted and pushed through the gates. When the sergeant became aware of what had happened, George had reached the traffic-jammed street. The sergeant shook his head to mutter, 'Stupid bugger. Serve him right!' and turned back to crowd control.

Ten minutes later George reached the business district. The crowds had thinned to merely a few here and there, although the crackle of distant gunfire had a sobering effect. He paused and pulled out a paper to double-check the address of his meeting, although he was familiar with the district from previous visits. He turned into a near-deserted side street which took him to a small square with a splashing fountain in its centre. He was suddenly confronted by a group of Indian soldiers. When one of the sepoy's dropped to his knees, raised his rifle and took aim, George stopped in chilled disbelief and raised his arms. 'I'm British. Don't shoot!' he cried.

The sepoy's finger squeezed on the trigger. The gunshot was like thunder in the confines of the tiny square. It was the last sound George would ever hear.



The young corporal completed his summation report to his senior officer as they stood at the Red Fort's imposing Amar Singh Gate.

Sporadic gunfire had drawn close to the unit's HQ. Colonel Edward Donnithorne nodded in acknowledgement of what he had been told. 'Well, given the circumstances, casualties have been light. Pity about the young English chap, though.'

The corporal shrugged. 'He wouldn't have known our sepoy brothers had gone over to the other side, I suppose.'

'You'll need to make a report. You know the procedures,' Edward told the corporal. He added, 'Do we know who the civilian was?'

The corporal fished some paper from his tunic pocket. 'Yes. Says here, "businessman, from Bombay. Called Cuthbertson".'

The name seemed to ring a bell for Edward, and for a few moments the reason didn't register. 'Cuthbertson?' he asked himself. 'Oh, I suppose it's a common enough name,' he added, as much for himself as for the corporal, who continued to consult the paper in his hand. 'Yes, sir. A George Cuthbertson.'

'George ... did you say?'

The corporal looked up from the paper, his curiosity aroused. Edward had fallen silent. Could it have been the cad who had jilted his sister? It seemed to be too much of a coincidence.

The corporal was prompted to ask, 'You, er, knew this man, sir?'

Edward snapped out of it. He shook his head. 'I never met him,' he said quietly. The soldier threw a salute and turned to leave Edward alone with his thoughts.

When Edward sent word from India about the death of George Cuthbertson, the family agonised over whether or not to inform Eliza. In the end they decided to keep George's fate from Eliza, fearful that such news would exacerbate her fragile emotional state. Knowing that George would never enter the partially opened doors with their gleaming beacon might prove to be fatal for her.

Thus the years continued to pass by with Eliza convinced that one day she would be claimed as a bride.

The outside world had become an alien, virtually unknown place

for Eliza locked within her own twilight existence in the deteriorating mansion. Stores and commercial buildings had sprung up, with many fine homes demolished to make way for the new developments. King Street was unrecognisable. A railway system was spreading its steel tracks and they passed through Newtown on the way to the western regions. Steamships were arriving in growing number from distant lands, signalling the end of the dominance of sail. Sydney had become an established and prosperous Georgian city.



In 1886, on the anniversary of what would have been Eliza's wedding day, she prepared to follow a routine that never varied. Although on this occasion, it would be different.

Eliza, clad in her crumpled bridal attire, veil pulled back, and wearing her wedding jewellery, a flickering candle in one hand, reached the bottom of the grand staircase and approached the locked doors of the long dining room.

She placed the candle on a small side table adjacent to the silent grandfather clock. She produced a key and unlocked the door and drew aside the heavy rasping bolts. Eliza pushed open the doors on their squeaking hinges. Retrieving the candle, she stepped inside and peered into the silent chamber.

The remains of the banquet were gradually revealed as Eliza moved slowly about the room. The feast had collapsed into decay, and the plates, glasses and dishes were veiled in their spiderweb shrouds. Squeaking rodents stirred the rotting remains into fine clouds of dust as they scrambled about, leaping from table and chairs to escape the feeble illumination.

Eliza settled into a dusty, high-backed chair which had been left unshrouded at what would have been the wedding party's table. She held the candle up and gazed about.

In her mind's eye, the rotting, crumbling, web-daubed banquet with its once-elaborate settings were gradually transformed to their former glory. The crystal sparkled, the silver and cutlery glinted anew, the many-tiered wedding cake dominated the table. She heard the murmur of chatting guests and occasional bursts of carefree laughter which belonged to a joyous day, the clink of cutlery on plates, the popping of corks.

Eliza reacted to yet another vision. A slow smile lit her sagging, parchment features. A young and handsomely attired George Cuthbertson stood in the entrance of the long dining room. He smiled with delight on seeing Eliza above the smattering of applause at the appearance of the groom. He slowly crossed the floor towards her, pausing to acknowledge the guests who reached out to attract his attention and offer congratulations.

Eliza's candle had burned down. She placed it on the table before her, supporting it in a puddle of its own congealed wax. Then she sagged back into the chair and slowly closed her eyes, still smiling. The stub of the candle was being drowned in its own waxen pool. Its little flame fluttered, as if for its own life. It was a forlorn gesture. With a final flicker it was at last extinguished, and darkness again reigned.

The next morning, seeing the dining room doors open, Sarah went to investigate. She found her mistress, slumped in the high-backed chair. Her frozen, pale face looked peaceful with a soft and gentle smile. Sarah stifled a cry. She told herself that perhaps at last her beloved mistress had finally escaped her long and lonely night. She prayed that Eliza was now reunited with the love of her life. And that in death that which had eluded her had finally been found.



Eliza Emily Donnithorne passed away from heart failure on 20 May 1886. Camperdown Lodge is no more, now the locale of business

premises. The grand home of Eliza's friend, Vicky Sedgewick, still survives in Newtown, occupied by a charitable group. Author Charles Dickens knew a number of people from whom he could have learned of Eliza Donnithorne and her tragic story. Dickens's son, Walter, worked in India in the same office as had Eliza's father, James, where gossip and rumour on the fate of his daughter were rife. Dickens and James's son, Edward, were close neighbours in Twickenham, and were members of the same gentlemen's club. The novelist employed two Sydney researchers, one who lived near Camperdown Lodge, to provide him with information. In his novel *Great Expectations*, Miss Havisham is jilted by a cad named Compeyson. Eliza's lost love was named Cuthbertson.



Many years after the events depicted herein, an article appeared in a Sydney newspaper concerning Camperdown Lodge and Eliza Emily Donnithorne. The journalist who wrote it was named Colbert Moore.

Final Words

As noted elsewhere here, Camperdown Lodge has been demolished, although Mont Eagle House, the residence of the Sedgewicks, remains and retains many of its original features. It is situated on the corner of King and Georgina Streets, although in Eliza's day the latter was known as L'Avenue. Camperdown Lodge, at 36 King Street, Newtown, was built by a Mr McDermot in 1820 as his family home. No expense was spared. Marble was imported from Italy and fine timbers from England. In 1840 Camperdown Lodge (named after Lord Nelson's naval campaign) was described in a local newspaper as the finest house in the district. Although not gas lit, large crystal chandeliers illuminated by tallow candles provided effective lighting. Eventually, it was purchased by Mr Samuel Horden, who had the mansion demolished in order to erect a theatre on the site. The theatre was burnt down during World War 1 and replaced by shops.



Colne Lodge at Twickenham, near London, the home of Eliza's brother Edward and where she spent part of her early childhood, was designed by Isaac Ware and built in 1765. Upon the death of Edward, the property passed on to another member of the family, Edward George Moore Donnithorne (1842–1906) who was forced to sell the

mansion after a business failure. It remained vacant until 1927 when it was demolished to make way for council flats. The site where it had once stood now has a street named after the estate.



Vashi Larkman is a composite character made up of James Donnithorne's Anglo-Indian manservant, who was known as Lemon Syrup, and Charles Larkman, who entered James's employment in Sydney. Larkman ended up on the goldfields of western New South Wales where he was murdered. The details of his death remain unknown.



Ann Kelly, having divorced William, remarried with an adopted son named James, believed to have been the result of her affair with James Donnithorne when housekeeper at Camperdown Lodge. James provided for the support and education of the boy in his will.



George Cuthbertson, who ended up in India, was killed, allegedly 'accidentally', during the Indian Uprising of 1857. Nothing further is known about him.



After her death, Eliza's elderly servants, Sarah and Elizabeth Bailey, lived in the cottage provided for them in Lennox Street, Newtown. Elizabeth was the first to pass away. Sarah saw out the last of her days in a cottage in nearby Church Street. Neither dwelling remains. In

her will, Eliza provided an annuity for the sisters to ensure they were financially independent.



It was generally accepted that in the normal course of events James Donnithorne would have received a knighthood in view of his links with the Royal Family via his father, Nicholas, who had been an adviser and close confidant to King George, and James's posts of influence such as a judge and governor of the Bank of Bengal. However, James's involvement in scandals with his friend the Prince Regent, and his many affairs with various women in India, mitigated against such an honour.



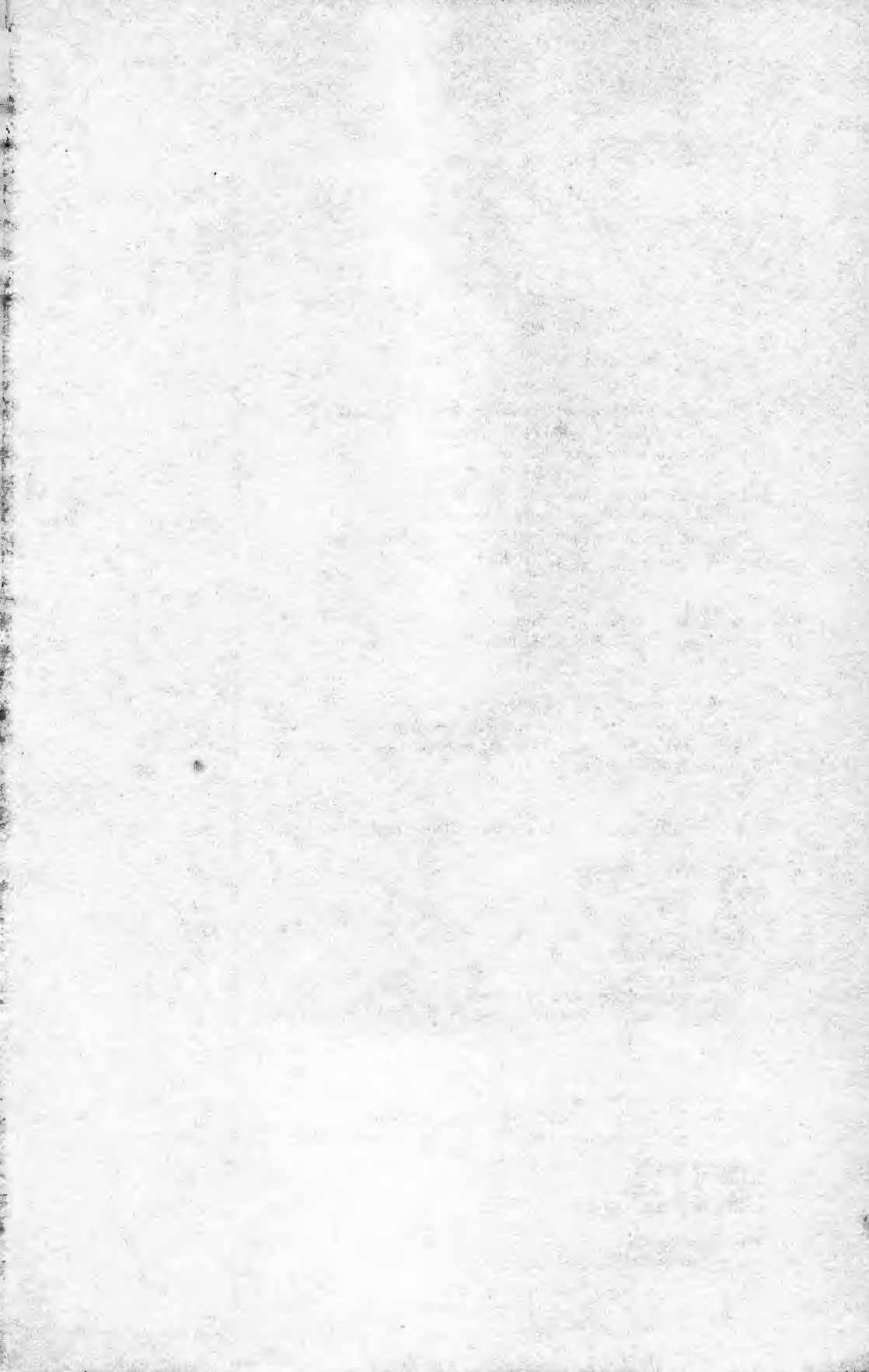
Clyde Street in Sydney's Rocks district no longer exists, nor does the rest of the street. In the 1920s, with the construction of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, the street was built over during works on the Bridge's southern approaches to the city. Thus, the place where the lovers would meet is now entombed below the rumble of today's incessant traffic.

Sources

Should any persons or sources have been overlooked, this was not intentional, and for which I apologise herewith as yet another example of human frailty.

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Published in 2011 by New Holland Publishers (Australia) Pty Ltd
Sydney • Auckland • London • Cape Town
www.newholland.com.au

1/66 Gibbes Street Chatswood NSW 2067 Australia
218 Lake Road Northcote Auckland New Zealand
86 Edgware Road London W2 2EA United Kingdom
80 McKenzie Street Cape Town 8001 South Africa

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A record of this book is available at the National Library of Australia

ISBN 9781742571935

Publisher: Fiona Schultz
Publishing manager: Lliane Clarke
Senior editor: Mary Trewby
Designer: Celeste Vlok
Production manager: Olga Dementiev
Printer: Toppan Leefung Printing Limited

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Miss Havisham is one of the most memorable characters in English literature. Charles Dickens placed the jilted bride at the heart of his novel *Great Expectations*.

There was a real Miss Havisham who Dickens used for his story. Her name was Eliza Emily Donnithorne and she lived in self-imposed exile in a locked, shuttered mansion in colonial Sydney. An heiress from a wealthy and privileged family, Eliza and her unlikely and tragic fate became the talk of the town. Alan Wardrobe digs into the life and times of Eliza to recreate her story.

ALAN WARDROPE has spent more than thirty years in the international motion picture industry, mostly with major studios, writing, producing and marketing. He has worked in New York, Los Angeles, London and Sydney and in Asia. His book *The Secrets of the Screen Trade* is a classic reference for the movie industry.

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ISBN 9781742571935



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